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A TREATISE

ON

Despondency in the Pursuit of Piety;

FOLLOWED BY ONE ON

Temptations.

BY

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Editor's Preface.

To Pious and Devout Souls:—

I present you this little book, confident of its value—it is the posthumous work of a Priest, who was not only member of a celebrated society, and Professor of Theology, but was also a pious and enlightened director.

In this book you will therefore find wholesome instruction, great knowledge of the interior life, and of the human heart,—the result of years of experience in the direction of souls.

The subject is at once, both highly important and very difficult. The Author has not confined himself to general principles, and vague maxims, but he has entered into the very sanctuary of the soul, into its secret folds and most intricate windings. The thread of Reason, the light of Faith and the torch of Experience, have led him safely through that labyrinth, where so many lose themselves, rashly attempting to explore it without the proper guides. A few principles, presented under different aspects, solve all difficulties, throw light upon doubts that are ever recurring, expose all the subterfuges of self-love, sloth and cowardice, refute their objections and silence their excuses.

The Author has followed the most useful plan for works of this kind. He adopts the method of reasoning—and his reasoning is as clear as it is solid. The greater number of persons who profess piety, prefer appeals to their imagination and to their heart, rather than to their reason. They like to be excited by lively

descriptions, and by tender and touching language; but in so doing, they are seeking a passing gratification rather than a real and permanent benefit. Such descriptions and sentiments soon fade away, but the fruits of conviction are more lasting. Pure reason and true Faith never vary; imagination and feeling are incessantly changing according to the different objects which act upon them.

It is from indolence that feeling is preferred to reasoning. The greater part of mankind are indolent, and hence there are so few who care to reflect and reason. But one who has an earnest love for virtue and duty, who is anxious about his salvation, should not shrink from the mental effort which the exercise of reason and of Faith requires. We should remember that no sincere and permanent resolution can be taken, without a conviction of its necessity. This is according to the natural order of reason, and to the economy of grace. The understanding must be enlightened before the will can be moved.

This work appears to be specially intended for the instruction of persons living in religious communities, and for seculars aiming at perfection; but in this age of indifference and discouragement, all, who profess the true faith may here find no little help to undeceive them in their errors, and to strengthen them against the wiles of self-love. We venture to hope that even Directors of consciences may discover therein, that which will increase their light, and supply for any want of experience in their difficult and dangerous ministry.

A TREATISE

ON

DESPONDENCY

IN THE PURSUIT OF PIETY.

Chapter 1.

ON THE DANGERS AND FATAL EFFECTS OF DESPONDENCY.

DESPONDENCY is the most dangerous temptation that the enemy of our salvation can employ. In other temptations he attacks some one virtue in particular, and shews himself openly: by despondency he attacks them all, but covertly. The snare is readily perceived in other temptations: one finds in religion, often even in reason, principles which condemn them. The knowledge of the evil, to which we cannot blind ourselves, conscience, and the truths of religion which are awakened, serve as helps to sustain us. But in despondency there is nothing to lean upon; we feel that reason does not suffice to enable us to practise all the good that God requires of us. On the other hand, we dare not hope to receive from God all the help we need, to overcome our passions; thus we become discouraged and nearly reduced to despair, the very

point to which the devil tries to lead the despond ent soul.

In other temptations we clearly perceive that it is wrong to allow the mind to dwell upon them; but in despondency which disguises itself under a multiplicity of forms, we see strong motives for yielding to the feeling, which we do not look upon as a temptation. This feeling, however, makes us imagine that perseverance in the practice of virtue is impossible, and it leaves the soul liable to be overcome by all its passions. It is therefore of the utmost importance to avoid this snare.

Chapter 2.

THE MOST FATAL EFFECT OF DESPONDENCY IS, THAT THE SOUL THAT YIELDS TO IT, DOES NOT VIEW IT AS A TEMPTATION. HOPE AND CONFIDENCE IN GOD, ARE AS MUCH A COMMANDMENT AS FAITH, AND THE OTHER VIRTUES.

THE great danger of despondency is, that being deceived by an excessive fear which makes us blind to the truth, and being discouraged at the sight of difficulties against which we find no resource in ourselves, we nevertheless do not look upon this state as the effect of temptation. Could we only see it in that light, we should beware of the suggestions that entertain it, and should get rid of our trouble more quickly and more easily.

Let it however be well understood, that despondency is a temptation, and bears all the marks of being such; for every feeling which is opposed to the law of God, either in itself, or by the consequences it may have, is evidently a temptation. It is thus we judge of every temptation to which we are liable. If we have a thought against Faith, a feeling against Charity or against some other virtue, we look upon it as a temptation; we turn away from it, and try to elicit acts opposed to the thought or feeling which has put us in danger of offending God.

Now Hope and Confidence in God are commanded equally with Faith and the other virtues. Therefore the feeling which is opposed to Hope is as much forbidden, as that which is against Faith or any other virtue: it has thus every feature of a real temptation.

The law of God obliges us frequently to make acts of Faith, Hope and Charity; and hence forbids us all wilful feelings contrary to these sacred and necessary virtues. How then can despondency be viewed otherwise than as a temptation, and even as a very dangerous temptation, since it exposes the Christian soul to abandon every work of piety.

To make this danger clearer to you, consider the general course of conduct among men. Is it not the hope of success, of procuring some advantage, or of avoiding some evil, or of satisfying some desire or some passion, which makes them act;

which supports them under their labors and animates them to overcome their difficulties? Take away from them all hope, and they would soon fall into inaction. None but a madman would strive for an object, which he despairs of obtaining. In religious life, despondency produces the same effect; it is founded on the same principle, the want of means to reach the end which we propose to ourselves.

When we lose all hope of overcoming the difficulties which we may find in the practice of any virtue, we do not try, or but feebly, to make the effort to do so. These insufficient efforts only increase our weakness, and being more than half overcome by despondency, we are easily led away by the passion that sways us. The sight of our weakness first throws us into doubt and into trouble. In that state, occupied only by the difficulty of the combat, we do not distinguish the principles which ought to guide us. The fear of not succeeding prevents us from employing the means which God has given us, and we are thus defenseless against our enemy. We are like a child who, seeing the approach of a Giant, begins to tremble, and forgets that a stone thrown in the name of the Lord, may lay him prostrate. In the same manner do we forget that we have a powerful help in the goodness of a tender Father, upon whom we have only to call, to be victorious in all our struggles.

Chapter 3.

SOURCE AND CAUSE OF THE IMPRESSIONS WHICH DESPONDENCY MAKES ON THE SOUL OF THE CHRISTIAN.

THE reason despondency makes such strong and fatal impressions on us, I shall now proceed to show. We are well convinced of our weakness, for we have often experienced it. We feel keenly the difficulty we have to overcome ourselves, as we succeed but rarely. Filled with these sad and discouraging reflections of our want of strength, and of the little we do to please God, we consider it useless to have recourse to Him, who, we think, will not hearken to our prayer, whilst we are in our present state! Sad evidence of the pride of the human heart, which would wish to owe to itself the good which it does, and the happiness to which it aspires! and how opposed to the words of the Holy Ghost: "*What hast thou, that thou hast not received?*" (I. COR. iv, 7).

In such a state we only see, and only depend upon our own efforts, so that our despondency diminishes, ceases, returns or increases, according as we act well or ill. We do not reflect that it is only from the mercy of God we can hope for help, and not by our own merits; that when we have done well, it is through the grace of God, which we have not merited, and that, in every circum-

stance, this Mercy is ever ready to dispense to us the necessary grace.

When these desponding souls are told that they ought, after the example of the Saints, to put all their confidence in God, they will at once answer, that it is not surprising that the Saints had confidence in God, since they were Saints and served God with fidelity: but that they have not the same right to feel that perfect confidence in Him, which the Saints had. They do not perceive that such reasoning is contrary to the principles of true religion.

Hope is a theological virtue, and its motive can be found only in God. These souls make it a human virtue, when its source or motive is recognized in man or in his ways. The Saints did not hope in God, because they were faithful to God, but they were faithful to God because they hoped in Him. Otherwise the sinner could never make an act of hope, and yet it is that very act of hope which disposes him to return to God.

Observe that St. Paul does not say: I have obtained mercy because I have been faithful, but "*Having obtained mercy of the Lord, to be faithful.*" (I. Cor. vii, 25). Mercy always precedes the Good which we do; and it is from Mercy alone that we have the necessary grace to do any good at all. The Saints never counted upon their works to strengthen their confidence in God; for they were ever mindful of the words of our Saviour:

"*So also, ye, when ye shall have done all these things that have been commanded to you, say: we are unprofitable servants.*" (LUKE xvii, 10). The greater Saints they were, the greater was their humility. Their humility allowed them to see only the perfection to which they had not yet reached. Unlike the Pharisee in the Gospel, they found nothing in themselves to warrant their confidence, but in the mercy of God they sought and found a confidence, the foundations of which could not be shaken. This was what supported them, and this it is, which must encourage you, and re-animate your fainting strength. It is of the utmost importance for you to understand this truth, that you may not again fall into the snare which your enemy has so often laid for you.

Chapter 4.

OF THE TRUE MOTIVE FOR CHRISTIAN HOPE — THIS MOTIVE IS THE SAME FOR ALL MEN.

ACCORDING to religion the motive of Christian Hope, or of confidence in God, is the same for all men, Saints and sinners.

Hope, as we have already said, is a theological virtue, like Faith and Charity. Its motive, then, can be found only in God, and can rest only, upon

divine perfection. It follows, therefore, that we exclude from this motive our own merits. We do not hope in God, because we have been faithful to Him, but we hope in Him, that we may obtain the grace to be faithful.

On what, then, is Christian Hope founded, and what is its motive, according to Religion? Pope Benedict XIV., in his form of the *Act of Hope*, has pointed out the divine perfections which constitute this motive. The act is this: "*Oh my God I hope in Thee, because Thou art faithful to Thy all powerful promises, and because Thy mercies are infinite.*" In this motive there is nothing human, all is drawn from God Himself. And could there be a stronger motive to strengthen us in hope and in the confidence of God? We here find the mercy of God, who is more anxious to shower His gifts upon man, than man is to receive them; who desires their real good and their salvation, much more sincerely than they desire it themselves, since He restrains them by His grace, which of themselves they could not merit, and since He prepares for them aid proportionate to the trials to which He exposes them — an aid which they can obtain by prayer, and with it conquer the evil one. This mercy is so infinite, that all the malice of mankind cannot exhaust it; and which, after having manifested itself so wonderfully in the gift which God has granted us, His only Son for our

ransom, will not refuse us the assistance which He desires to afford us in this priceless benefit.

The effects of this divine Mercy have been promised to us by the assurances which God has made us, of coming to our assistance, whenever we ask it, to work out our salvation. God, who is truth itself, cannot deceive us, and He is essentially faithful to the promises He makes His creatures. But we find in the Holy Scripture the most touching exhortations to have recourse to Him in our necessities, with the promise that He will be our support and our strength. Now, then, can we have any anxiety or seriously entertain any fear that He will reject or abandon us, when we call upon Him with confidence? Would not this be accusing God of not keeping His promise? But that would be blasphemy.

It is true that to grant our prayer, God requires that we should call upon Him with confidence — but should we deserve to obtain His benefits if we asked them with a doubting heart; doubting that very goodness of which we are experiencing the effect every instant of our lives, and in so many thousand ways? No, as the Apostle, St. James, says: "*Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.*" (i, 6). The heart that prays with doubt and distrust shall obtain nothing. And we also know that Jesus Christ whilst on earth only granted miracles when there was confidence: "*Daughter, thy faith hath healed thee.*" (MATT. ix, 22). God's almighty

power gives the crowning strength to this motive for Christian Hope, seeing that He exceeds all that we can require of Him. Men often promise that, which it is not in their power to give, but it is not thus with the all-powerful God. We can find no insurmountable obstacles to His will, in the gifts which He desires to make to us. He has in the boundless treasury of His graces, infallible means to lead us to holiness. Therefore we ought never to fear asking Him too much, or asking things too difficult.

God being infinitely rich, possesses all good, in the order of grace, as in the order of nature. Being infinitely powerful, there are none of these treasures of which He cannot make us partake. Being infinitely good, He is disposed to grant us according to His promises, all that is necessary for our salvation. It is on these substantial motives, drawn from the perfections of God, that we should found our Hope — and only thus can our confidence have that unshaken firmness which it ought to have.

Chapter 5.

A POWERFUL MOTIVE FOR CONFIDENCE IS THE INFINITE VALUE OF THE SUFFERINGS AND MERITS OF JESUS CHRIST.

A SOUL that is addicted to despondency, is swayed by fear, which prevents it from reflecting on the immovable foundations of confidence in God. We cannot therefore give her too many motives for overcoming that fear which harasses her incessantly. She will find a powerful one in the sufferings of Jesus Christ, which are as infinite, as the dignity of his person is immense. This divine Saviour dying for all mankind, praying for all, offering for all His sufferings and His death, has merited for them all the graces which are necessary for them to overcome their spiritual enemy and to gain eternal happiness. These merits which Jesus Christ did not need for himself He has given over to mankind. So that, according to St. Bernard, these merits become our own. And by offering them to the Father, we obtain that help which we need to strengthen us against the enemies of our salvation. It is from this principle that the Church, in all the prayers she makes to God, always invokes the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.

"But," exclaims a soul, frightened at the thought of her many past offenses, "how must our Lord and Saviour look upon me, after the

many outrages which I have committed against Him! Can He any longer interest Himself for one who has been so long His enemy?" Can a well-instructed Christian soul have any doubt on this point? Did not Jesus Christ Himself assure us, that He came into the world to suffer and die for sinners; that He came chiefly to seek for sinners? Now, in the face of this assertion, will they still imagine that, because they are sinners, they will be refused the help they require to return to God? No, Heaven and Earth may pass away, but the promises of God shall not pass away unfulfilled. These promises relate to sinners, and if there had been no sinners, would Jesus Christ have suffered? Would He have submitted to a cruel death? The more sinful man is, the more strikingly are the mercy of God, and the power of the Saviour's merits displayed. Is there any blacker crime than the treachery of Judas? Yes, answers St. Jerome, there is one still more enormous, *despair!* Judas rendered himself more guilty in taking away his own life, than in betraying his divine Master.

Let us then never fear to have recourse to the merits of Jesus Christ. We honor them when we make use of them to obtain the helps which we need, since it was for this, that Jesus Christ vouchsafed to acquire them and to give them over to us. It is in applying them to ourselves through prayer

and good works, that we fulfil the end for which they were purchased.

It would be a singular way of honoring them, the not daring to make use of them; it would be going directly against the end which our divine Saviour proposed to Himself. In turning from His gifts as useless, we would not be evincing our esteem for them, but only proving our indifference.

Since we acknowledge that we are poor, weak and miserable, should we not seek to enrich and to strengthen ourselves, and to cure our evils? Jesus Christ offers Himself to accomplish these miracles in us, by offering His infinite merits. With loving tenderness He says to us: "*Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy burdened and I will refresh you.*" (MATT. xi, 28). Is it not therefore against every principle, against every feeling, and still more against the intention of the Saviour Himself to fear to have recourse to Him?

Temptation attacks the soul in every way. Through a sentiment of false humility, a fear is conceived which fills the soul with dejection. Christian humility and sound reason require, that we should recognize our unworthiness of heavenly benefits; but they do not require us to refuse those which are offered, or not to ask for those that have been promised to our prayers. Still more does the gratitude which we owe to Jesus Christ require that we should obey His will, in profiting by His sufferings, to obtain the graces which He

has earned for us. Never can we honor Him more than in corresponding to the merciful designs which He had in immolating Himself for us.

On what could we rely, to appease the justice of God outraged by sin, and to draw down His mercy, if not upon the merits of our Saviour? It is in presenting them to God that we may hope to disarm His anger. Just as He can only see in us that which must provoke His justice; so in His Son He only sees what solicits His mercy. This Divine Mercy is exercised in our behalf as soon as we, with sentiments of regret, present ourselves to Him, under the shadow of the Saviour's cross, and covered with His precious blood. And thus also is justice appeased. Mercy and truth, justice and peace make together a blessed treaty for us. In the language of the Psalmist: "*Mercy and truth have met each other; justice and peace have kissed.*" (Ps. lxxxiv, 11).

Chapter 6.

MOTIVE OF CONFIDENCE FOR THE RELIGIOUS SOUL, IN THE MERCY WHICH GOD HAS SHOWN IN SELECTING HER FOR THE GRACE OF HER VOCATION. FALSE IDEAS AND FEELINGS WHICH WE ASCRIBE TO GOD.

THE religious sees in his vocation a strong proof of God's mercy in his regard. There is no one, no matter what his state may be, who, after having served God with fidelity, falls into sin, or into a state of indifference, and again seeks to return to God, that ought to doubt of His mercy, and that the atoning merits of our Lord will be applied in his behalf. That contrite feeling, that holy desire to return to God and to the faithful discharge of our duties, does it not come from God Himself? That strength, that courage to sacrifice the goods and pleasures of this world, his evil passions and his own will, from whom does all this come but from God? That tender devotion, which led him to consecrate himself to God, and sustained him in all his conflicts against his natural inclinations, who inspired it but God?

If we could be so presumptuous as to imagine that we owe this to ourselves, the experience of our weakness should alone undeceive us, and the words of our Lord condemn us. As He spoke to His Apostles, so does He still speak to every soul consecrated to His service: "*Ye have not chosen*

Me; but I have chosen you," (JOHN xv, 16), even before you thought of Me, whilst you neglected Me, and turned away from Me, and obstinately resisted Me! Can God have done so much for us, and yet not really wish to aid us when we call upon Him for help? Surely, to think this would be to accuse God of contradicting Himself. No; when such a soul has recourse to God, He will finish the work He has commenced in her, and lead her on to the perfection of her state. To this He has pledged His word; and He still continues to urge the desponding soul lovingly to cast herself into the bosom of His mercy, there to find her peace and her salvation.

It is because we judge God by our own weak human hearts, that we fear to exhaust His mercy. If a person, to whom we have given important assistance, whom we have loaded with benefits, treats us with ingratitude, and, in return for kindness, heaps insults upon us, we turn away from him as unworthy of further notice, more especially if he has made use of our very benefits to injure us — we abandon him forever. We should consider we were acting against every dictate of common sense and prudence, did we continue to furnish him with arms to use against us.

The same feelings and judgment we ascribe to God; forgetting that His ways are as far removed from our ways as the Heavens are from the Earth. God bears with our wanderings because He is eter-

nal and all-powerful, and He knows that the day of His justice will come, when all will be brought into order, and forever. He is patient, because He is infinitely good, and wishes to give us the means to return to Him. He who knows all things has seen, from all eternity, all our weaknesses, our ingratitude, and our reiterated falls. He has foreseen that we could not do any thing of ourselves, much less return to Him without help; and that help He has prepared for us, in the person of His Son, Jesus. He entreats us, he even commands us to call upon him, in all our wanderings, and He will assist us, He will be our propitition; for it is in helping us and pardoning us that His mercy is exercised.

This conduct God evinced in a striking manner toward the Jewish nation. Whenever they fell into idolatry, God punished them, to bring them back to their allegiance. When they abandoned their Lord to serve strange gods, He would deliver them over to their enemies, to be held in cruel bondage. Then, when bowed down by the miseries of their servitude, they lifted up their hearts to God and called upon Him with confidence, God sent them a deliverer to free them from the hard yoke under which they groaned. And so did they continue during a period of four hundred years, continually relapsing into idolatry, and as often experiencing the mercy of God when they called upon Him.

Judge from this if God will tire in pardoning us, if we turn to Him with a sincerely contrite heart. But if the conduct of God towards His Jewish people does not remove your fears, listen to the words of the Prophet-King, inspired by the Holy Ghost, who assures us that God: "*Will not despise a contrite and humbled heart.*" (Ps. l, 19).

When, terrified by the recollection of our sins, we have the thought or the wish to return to God, it is He who is then attracting us by His grace. Does He call us only that He may refuse to receive us? Who can think it? He told St. Peter to forgive after every offense: "*I say not to thee, till seven times, but till seventy times seven,*" (MATT. xviii, 22), and by this we may learn to know His dispositions in our regard. Ah! we little know the boundless tenderness of that divine Heart, if we judge of it by our own, or if we imagine that It ever ceases to care for us. So long as we are in this life we are under the law of Mercy, and of that mercy we can ever avail ourselves. It is death only that places us under the law of immutable Justice.

Chapter 7.

OUR REITERATED INFIDELITIES OUGHT NOT TO MAKE US LOSE CONFIDENCE IN GOD — IT IS THE WANT OF FAITH WHICH MAKES US FEAR.

God, who is the tender Father of all His creatures, has taken every means to remove that excessive fear which would draw them from Him. To prevent the soul, that has become sensible of its ingratitude and terrified at the view of its repeated relapses into sin, after so often obtaining pardon for them — to prevent such a soul from losing all hope and daring no longer to cry out to Him from the abyss into which it has again fallen, not only does He assure it, by the mouth of the Psalmist: "*That those who hope in Him shall never be confounded*," but He expressly declares the positive law of His mercy and commands us to hope in Him.

This precept we cannot fully accomplish but with the help of His grace; and can the Almighty have made this precept and not wish to help us keep it? And can He fail to be touched by our obedience, when we endeavor to do so? Can He turn away from us, when we call upon Him, as He has ordered us to do? No; God cannot be otherwise than faithful to His promises. If we fail, it is because we have not asked with confidence, and because our faith is weak.

Let the Holy Scripture here furnish you with another proof of this. St. Peter, at the order of his divine Master, confidently walks upon the waters. The wind rises, and the Apostle's trust lessens; he fears, and immediately begins to sink — but the danger re-animates his confidence: Peter has recourse to his divine Master, Who stretches forth His hand to save him from perishing. For our instruction Jesus let His Apostle know what danger he had been in, when He thus reproached him: "*Oh thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?*" (MATT. xiv, 31).

A faithful picture of what too often happens to Christian souls! So long as all is at peace in our hearts, we proceed with confidence towards Jesus. But let the winds of temptation arise; let the difficulties of our vocation be felt, we become terrified — we forget that we are walking at the call of Jesus; we begin to fear, we hesitate in our confidence; and this first infidelity weakens us still further — and we begin to sink. If our confidence does not reanimate and lead us to ask for help, we shall be overwhelmed.

St. Peter would have perished, had he not called upon Jesus for help; and his kind Master heard him. If we have imitated the Apostle in our weakness, like him also, let us lose no time in invoking the Saviour in our need. We should experience his protection, and thus should we be

spared all those anxieties, and fears, and falls, which our want of confidence occasions. Help is ever at hand, and ever ready for the asking; it is our own fault if we do not make use of it.

Chapter 8.

GOD IS NEVER SO NEAR TO US, TO ASSIST US IN OUR CONFLICTS, AS WHEN WE IMAGINE HIM FAR AWAY. HE HIDES HIMSELF ONLY THAT WE MAY SEEK HIM, AND FIND HIM.

SOMETIMES God does not make us wait for Him long, and we have a sensible feeling of His assistance, as soon as we call upon Him. Hardly had Peter exclaimed "Lord, save me, or I perish!" but the hand of the Saviour was stretched forth to save him. At other times our divine Lord acts in a more hidden manner. Sometimes He watches our struggles without letting His presence be felt, but never is He so near to us, so ready to help us, as soon as we call, as when the danger is greatest and most pressing. We become terrified, because we do not seriously realize our Saviour's presence; we think He is afar off, and yet He is in our very heart, and it is He that is strengthening us. We think He is unmindful of our danger, and all the time He is watching over our preservation, moderating the swelling waves of our passions, that might

cause us to sink, saying to them, "*Hitherto thou shalt come, and thou shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves.*" (JOB, xxxviii, 11). Our Saviour who has taught us by His actions as well as by His words, gives us upon this subject a lesson which is as clear, as it is consoling. Once as he lay in Peter's bark, it was tossed by a furious storm, which seemed to threaten its total wreck. He appears to be sleeping, and unconscious of the danger, but He is all the while directing the disciples in the efforts they are making to save their little craft. But the danger and the labor continue so long as they forget to have recourse to their divine Master, and with that confidence which works miracles. As soon as they call upon Him, He answers, He rises, and commands the winds and waves to be still. "*And there came a great calm.*" (MATT. viii, 26). How often have we not experienced the same thing? When exposed to temptation, which God permits in order to strengthen us in humility and vigilance, we see ourselves upon the very edge of a precipice, into which we look with horror; we imagine that we have no longer any strength, and that we are on the point of yielding; but notwithstanding the efforts of the enemy, we keep up our courage, we resist, and we continue at the post of duty — in that trying situation, what strength upheld us? Surely we will not have the presumption to suppose that we have resisted by the power, or by the strength of those resolutions which have

so often wavered? Oh, no; we must admit that it was a celestial power that rescued us from shipwreck. Jesus Christ himself was secretly working in our hearts. His assistance was not apparent; it was not the less real; the arm that upheld us was invisible; it was not the less strong. We know not how we resisted, we only know that we have been victorious in our combat, through the grace of Jesus Christ, who has once more re-established in our heart, that peace which our temptation had disturbed. It is on such occasions that the soul must "*Against hope believe in hope.*" (ROMANS, iv, 18).

Chapter 9.

WE CAN NOT CONQUER WITHOUT FIGHTING — AND THERE IS NO FIGHTING WITHOUT TROUBLE.

THE arguments that show the necessity for Christian hope are readily admitted; but the devil endeavors by his artful suggestions, to make the despondent soul find pretexts for not applying them to herself. Indolence or aversion to everything that gives trouble, is common to all men. When we have devoted ourselves to God's service, we would like to enjoy the happiness of our condition, without its costing us much, forgetting the words of our Saviour—"*The kingdom of Heaven suffereth vio-*

lence, and the violent bear it away." (MATT. xi, 12). Let us ever remember that Christ did not enter into his glory until after he had suffered, and that He has admitted His saints to share it, only after crosses, and combats, and sacrifices, the renouncing of their passions and their self-will.

Heaven is a reward; and we can earn it only, by preferring God and His holy will before all other things, and being ready to sacrifice whatever is dearest to us, whenever He requires it. This, then, is certain, and St. Paul declares it, "*He that striveth for the mastery is not crowned, except he strive lawfully.*" (2 TIM. ii, 5). To aspire to the crown of Justice, without fighting, is a contradiction to the truths of Faith — to expect to fight, and yet not to suffer, is contrary to common sense. But it is often from the very knowledge we have, of what God requires of us, that the devil uses his arguments for discouraging us, making use of our sloth, to intimidate us from undertaking the necessary labor. It costs us nothing to follow our natural inclinations; it costs us much to repress them, and the enemy of our souls never loses sight of that, and contrives, readily enough, to make us prefer the former. Therefore does he set before our eyes a lively representation of the difficulties we shall undergo in the service of God, that our life will be a constant torture, and a constant battle. But on the other hand, he carefully conceals the peace of heart which we find in obeying God; the solid con-

solations we receive in our trials, the hope of our eternal reward. No, the devil will show us our weakness to its fullest extent, will remind us of our repeated relapses; but the mercy of God, and the support of that all-powerful arm which so often upheld us, he will try to make us forget.

Let us now see how we are apt to behave under this species of temptation. Entirely absorbed by the thought of our weakness and the difficulties of what we have undertaken, we fall into discouragement, instead of exclaiming with holy king David: "*Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me.*" (Ps. xxii, 4). In this state of discouragement, we have but a feeble hope that God will help us; we hardly expect it, we scarcely dare to ask for it; perhaps even, we fear to attain it, lest it should oblige us to relinquish certain favorite inclinations. In this condition, despairing of being able to persevere in such a life of self-violence, we struggle but feebly, if at all. Our first relapse serves to confirm this impression — that it is useless for us to resist, and that we must only wait for the time when our passions shall be weaker.

Henceforward, everything becomes more difficult. Disgust and the spirit of indifference, with regard to our duties, take possession of our mind and heart, and these duties are thus rendered only the more arduous. Our exercises of piety we omit altogether, or acquit ourselves of them so careless-

ly, that they can not be pleasing to God. A dissipated and distracted state of mind and heart, succeed to the interior life which we formerly led. We abandon our pious practices, resist grace, silence the voice of our conscience, and even avoid entertaining good thoughts. We follow only the bent of our inclinations and caprices, where we meet with no resistance. In His mercy, God may at times speak to us; but we have begun to dread the voice that would urge us to shake off the bonds of sloth and lukewarmness. This is the point to which the enemy of our salvation has sought to lead us; he wished to prevent us from reflection, and from working for our salvation; and he has succeeded.

These details are perhaps lengthy, but they may help you to understand the enemy's plan of attack, and enable you to prepare a defense which shall defeat his designs.

I am quite aware that could we foresee all the difficulties and trials that must be encountered in the service of God, taken collectively for the space of a long life, we might well feel appalled. But is this the way in which we are called upon to encounter the trials of a Christian life? Our temptations and trials generally meet us separately; to-day we have one enemy to combat, to-morrow another, according to the occasion. If there are some that again and again have to be met and overcome, there are others that return but seldom. Against the former, we must guard ourselves in an

especial manner; against the latter we must prepare ourselves by frequent exercise of the love of God. It would surely evince great pusillanimity, to be afraid to resist an enemy that opposes us singly, and who grows strong only in proportion as we show ourselves to be weak. Tremble at his approach and you are overcome; but resist him, invoking God's assistance, and you are sure to conquer.

Never consider collectively, what is to be presented to you separately. We have only to answer for the present, and therefore to torment one's self about the uncertain future, is folly. Such conduct is really going in advance of temptation, or, in other words, seeking it; it is laying snares for one's own destruction. Why should we suffer in imagination that which we may never have to suffer in reality? "*Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.*" (MATT. vi, 34). To expose one's self to temptation, is contrary alike to religion, and to Christian prudence.

If, then, a person does violence to himself for the love of God, and in the hope of reward; if at any trial to which he is exposed, he occupies himself exclusively with it, and thinks only how he will derive from it the greatest benefit; he will easily undergo them all successively, by the grace of our Lord, and with great merit to himself.

A person in religious life feels a repugnance for the yoke and restraint of obedience and regularity;

suppose, instead of overcoming himself on each occasion, he begins to consider the difficulty of a whole life passed in such constraint; his courage sinks at the prospect, and he is ready to despair. But let him only look at it as the restraint of a day, or half a day, or only in connection with the present duty, half the difficulty vanishes, and he finds his strength is fully equal to it. And, indeed, it is frequently but a momentary trial, and the trouble ceases when the determination is firmly taken.

Let us rest assured too, that we are very much mistaken, if we think that the difficulty which we experience in self-mortification, and in performing our duties for the love of God, will continue as vivid and painful as we find them in the beginning. Experience teaches us that, on merely natural principles, when we frequently perform any action, or through the assistance of divine grace accustom ourselves to act from good motives, we contract a habit of doing so, which becomes easier with every repetition. Whatever difficulty at first existed, gradually diminishes, and finally disappears. Let us only, for a while, do violence to ourselves, and perform our actions with fidelity and exactness, as to time and place, and we shall soon find that we do them, as it were, instinctively, and the religious motive seems to present itself of its own accord. So true is this, that some scrupulous souls are apt to become troubled, and wrongly imagine that they have no merit, because they no longer feel the sac-

rifice or the suffering, in the duty which had cost them so much at first. They overlook the fact, that it is the supernatural motive, under the instigation of grace, which gives merit to the action, and not its difficulty.

Religion, moreover, teaches us, that God rewards the efforts we make to overcome ourselves, by imparting graces which not only lessen our difficulties, but even cause us to derive pleasure from what was at first so painful. And even should the trial continue for a longer time, He will never suffer it to surpass our strength aided by the grace which He has provided, and which we can always obtain through prayer. Rely on this promise, for it can never fail.

Let us never dwell upon the uncertainty of our perseverance, without also remembering God's assurance that He will help us, and reward us; this will strengthen us, and reanimate our confidence.

Chapter 10.

IT IS TEMPTING GOD AND TEMPTING ONE'S SELF, TO BE SOLICITOUS ABOUT THE CONFLICTS THAT MAY AWAIT US.

MANY will say, is it not required of me to have the disposition to fulfil all my obligations? Yet, when I foresee all that they may entail upon me, I do not feel the strength to undergo such conflicts for a whole life-time — how is it, then, possible not to tremble and to feel discouraged?

In the first place, as we have before remarked, these conflicts will not always continue with the same power, nor will you be so keenly conscious of them; therefore do not judge of the difficulty of persevering, by the difficulty you at present experience. Begin with your present help, and hope for the same in the time to come.

Secondly; God forbids us rashly to expose ourselves to the occasion of temptation. He has not promised His assistance to the one who, with distrustful solicitude, anticipates, in imagination, all his possible trials, and that *collectively;* trials which he may perhaps not have to undergo, and which, should they come at all, will certainly never come all at once. To-day you may not feel the strength to encounter them; but the hour for the battle has not yet struck — there is a grace awaiting you for that trial. You have not yet received

it, and it is no wonder, therefore, that you should feel alarmed.

But why should you expose yourself thus to temptations, contrary to the will of God? Why should you seek to sound your heart, to find out how you are disposed in regard to the heavy crosses, the violent temptations, and the protracted conflicts which others have to endure, and which, possibly, may fall to your lot? God has promised His sufficient grace for the sacrifices He requires of us. But He has not promised His assistance to those who, in imagination, place themselves in circumstances which do not exist, and to which, possibly, they may never be exposed.

The truly Christian soul is humble, and far from seeking danger, fears and avoids it. It is from rashness, from a secret presumption, and self-love, that you thus seek temptation.

Is it then surprising that you find your will weak and irresolute? God's holy grace is not dispensed according to our whims and fancies, but according to our real needs, when we submit to the order of His providence.

Let us, then, beware of the temptation which deludes imprudent and misguided souls, in causing them to dwell upon imaginary and future difficulties, which do not come from God, and leading them to neglect the present efforts and sacrifices which God is requiring of them. Losing sight of a reality, they follow a shadow.

The faithful soul, who desires to please God, must not anticipate, in her imagination, painful trials, under pretext of testing her readiness to accept them. This species of foresight God, far from approving, condemns. It is, in a certain sense, tempting divine providence. Though the intention that leads to it may appear good, do not trust to it, but carefully avoid it. What God requires of us, is an abiding determination not only to avoid sin, but its proximate occasions; to bear, with submission, the crosses that await us daily, and not to invent crosses, in order to carry them, before they are sent. It will be time enough to suffer, when God permits it, without seeking to suffer, beforehand, a trouble which He has not yet given us, and which, perhaps, He may never send. These imaginary evils, rashly taken upon ourselves, will be all the harder, because God will not aid us to bear them.

If the anticipation of these crosses intrudes itself upon the mind, without the consent of the will, then raise the heart to God, and say, with confidence and with love: "If it is Thy will, O my God, that these crosses be laid upon me, let me hope that, according to Thy promise, and through the merits of Jesus Christ, I may be assisted to carry them." After this little prayer banish these dangerous considerations; apply yourself to the faithful fulfilment of your duties, to mortifying

yourself when the occasion offers. This fidelity will be a much more certain and useful proof of your love of God.

Chapter 11.

OF WEARINESS, DISGUST, AND DIFFICULTIES IN THE SERVICE OF GOD—CAUSES OF A DISCOURAGEMENT CONTRARY TO REASON.

THE Christian who thinks that all his prayers are vain, to conquer his ruling passion, or to overcome an habitual temptation; who feels in the service of God only weariness and disgust, becomes perplexed and anxious. The evil one soon begins to suggest to him, that God does not hear him, that his prayers are useless, and thus leads him to the very brink of discouragement, seeing in God only a hard and angry master, whom he no longer hopes to be able to please. What deceives such a person (whom God has not abandoned, but permits to be tried) is, that as he serves God with disgust, with languor, and with dryness of heart, he presumes that his service is neither pleasing to God, nor meritorious to himself. This thought at first depresses him, and soon discourages him altogether, unless the Lord vouchsafes to grant him a return of that spiritual sweetness which he once enjoyed, and still continues to ask for. Such a person must be reminded of the truths of religion, which will

reanimate his confidence, and prove to him that his fears were groundless.

That weariness, those repugnances and disgusts which are often accompanied by other temptations, are not in themselves sins — they are not even imperfections; how then can they detract from the merit of our actions or prevent their being pleasing to God? Man cannot know the interior, and consequently judges of the merit and excellence of an action by outward appearances of zeal; so that, in his eyes, the *manner* in which the action is performed greatly augments or diminishes its value. But it is not thus with God — He reads the heart, and judges of the sincerity of our intentions in themselves, and without regard to exterior forms. To please God it suffices to be obedient to His holy will.

This truth is undeniable; we have for its support the word and example of Jesus Christ Himself. Our divine Lord, teaching his Disciples, says: "*He that doth the will of my Father who is in Heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven.*" (MATT. vii, 21). He does not say that we must do it with pleasure, or from a sensible attraction; He only requires us to do it, no matter what the difficulty may be, and it is for this that He promises us salvation. If that state of disgust and weariness does not prevent the Christian soul from properly performing the duties that God re-

quires of her, it follows that it is not an obstacle to sanctification and salvation.

Our divine Saviour confirms His teaching by His example. Though incapable, not only of sin, but even of the slightest imperfection, He chose, nevertheless, to undergo the same trials to which He subjects His creatures. In the desert, He permitted the evil spirit to tempt Him by suggestions of vanity, of worldly honors, and of presumptuous confidence. In the garden of Olives, at the prospect of the sufferings that awaited Him, and of the ingratitude of mankind, He underwent a most oppressive desolation of heart, profound sadness, and intense disgust. But as these temptations and feelings did not change His fidelity and submission to the will of the Father, in that state of suffering and desolation, He was not less the object of the admiration of Heaven and of the complacency of the Eternal Father.

It is therefore certain that the state of temptation, of desolation, of repugnance and weariness, that the soul may experience, however great it may be, is not a sin in itself; that these involuntary feelings are not even imperfections, and the duties performed whilst in that state are none the less pleasing to God and meritorious for salvation.

I cannot too much insist upon this truth; for I am conscious that there are many who, notwithstanding the words and example of Jesus Christ, are always troubled by what they experience in

this state of dryness and desolation — they have read that they must serve the Lord with gladness, and as soon as they cease to experience this feeling, which Jesus Christ does not require of them, and which does not depend upon them, but only upon God, as we shall elsewhere show, they begin to tremble and fear that they are separated from God; and even that they are already rejected by Him.

Let us reason still further upon this. As long as you do not yield to these temptations, to this dryness, and disgust, you endure them against your will, they do not depend upon you. If they depended upon you, you certainly would not permit them, since they make you suffer so much. Now, it is clear, that feelings, that do not depend upon you, which you do not wilfully entertain, which you even struggle against, cannot render you guilty before God. You are only responsible before God for that which depends upon yourself, to do or not to do, and is the free choice of your will.

This is a truth upon which the Church has decided, and which cannot therefore be doubted; it is a truth which reason herself teaches. How could we reconcile our belief of the Justice and Goodness of the Almighty with the idea that He would punish us for that which we could not avoid? It is, therefore, certain that a state of dryness has nothing in itself that can render the soul displeasing to God.

We must further add, for the consolation of tempted and discouraged souls, that if, in this state, they do not relax from the faithful discharge of their duties, they are really evincing to the Almighty a more fervent love; they obtain from Him a more convincing proof of His protection, and they receive more merit for their actions, than when, sustained by more sensible consolations, they experience little or no difficulty. It cannot be doubted that the more enemies there are to be conquered and difficulties to be surmounted, to accomplish the will of God, the more must such a soul be strengthened by divine love. If its love were weak it could not resist the evil powers that combine to overthrow it. The fidelity of the soul in that state, exhibits the mercy of God in her regard, in the strength of His grace, by which she is sustained, a grace which is so much the more powerful and meritorious, that it is not sensibly felt.

In these conflicts, which are frequently long and obstinate, we may commit some faults; it is the lot of human nature, but let them not cause alarm, for they are repaired by the sacrifices which we are constantly offering to God. If, then, we bear this cross with submission; if we constantly deny ourselves, to follow in the spirit of Faith, the light which we have received, can we fear we shall be rejected from among the followers of Jesus? Has not that divine Saviour said, that to follow Him

"*We must deny ourselves and take up our cross.*" (MATT. xvi, 24). This is what is done when we persevere notwithstanding our aridity, weariness and disgust. Can we think God will permit so many sacrifices to go unrewarded? No, the Apostle says: "*God is not unjust to forget your work, and the love which ye have shown in His name.*" HEBREWS, vi, 10). Be faithful, then, your reward is at hand. God's word can never fail. A few days of light labor, and then — eternity! an eternity of ineffable happiness—and a happiness which generally begins even in this life, by the graces of consolation and peace which God sends to the soul He has previously tried. Such is the lot awarded to you. The Saints have shared it with you.

Chapter 12

IT IS NOT WELL TO ASK GOD TO PUT AN END TO OUR TRIALS AND DIFFICULTIES, AND TO DESIRE THE IMMEDIATE FULFILMENT OF OUR PRAYERS.

NOTWITHSTANDING the truths we have just laid down, it must be admitted that this state of aridity and disgust is always hard to bear. Man naturally abhors difficulties and trials. Instead of being occupied with the advantages accruing from these conflicts, he is mindful only of the efforts they cost,

and turns to God for assistance. But what is his prayer? It is that God should put an end to this state of anxiety, weariness and disgust. If the Almighty does not grant it, but wishes to try him further, he imagines that he prays in vain, that God does not hear him, that he does not obtain the assistance which he implores. Trouble, fear and discouragement take entire possession of him. In this state, he does not know what to ask of God, he scarcely dares to address Him. While he exclaims with the Saviour, "*Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me,*" he has not the courage to add, "*nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou.*" (MATT. xxvi, 39). It requires a lively Faith and ardent love, thus to cast one's self into the arms of divine Providence, which nevertheless guards us with a care that is proportioned to the perfection of our confidence.

Religion teaches us, that God in his dealings with His creatures, can only have in view, His own glory, and their ultimate sanctification. It belongs, therefore, to God alone to decide in what way He chooses to be glorified by our service, and by what path He chooses to lead us to our sanctification and happiness. Shall the creature presume to serve the Creator, according to its own ideas and peculiar predilections — prescribe to Him the manner in which he wishes to be led by His Providence, and determine the conditions on which He must assign His rewards? The very idea is an extravagant de-

lusion; for it would be leaving us to be guided by our own passions and prejudices.

Man's position, therefore, with regard to God, must be that of an humble and entire submission. His first care must be to seek to know what God requires of him, and then to follow in the path He points out, with confidence, with love and docility. God must trace the plan; it is for man to execute it with the help of God's grace. If he enters the path with the proper dispositions, it will be the safest one for him, because God, in selecting it for his sanctification, has prepared especial graces to guide and strengthem him therein. Whenever we are thus in the state which Providence has designed for us, we may always expect this especial protection.

If God chooses to lead a soul to heaven through the path of dryness and desolation, may it pray that the will of Providence be changed in its behalf? It may, for even Christ did the same; and the prayer is often granted. A delay in granting a petition, is not a refusal; perseverance may obtain it from God, when the time to show us His mercy has come. But we should never make this the single object of our prayers, so as to become disheartened should it be refused. In so doing, we should not follow the example given by our Saviour, and imitated by His Saints; but rather the suggestions of the tempter, who seeks to turn us from

God, and the path His Providence has marked out for us.

The first and chief object of our prayers, should be to ask of God, submission to His holy will, and grace to fulfil with resignation, with fidelity and with love, the duties of the state in which He has placed us for our sanctification, for He and not ourselves, has chosen that state. But let this prayer be made with the humble conviction, that we deserve no favors from God, and that having had the misfortune to offend Him, it is only through His mercy that He continues to bear with us; and that like the Prodigal Son, we should not expect to be treated as His children, but like the meanest of His servants, bearing with the trials of our state, in the spirit of Penance, and abandoning ourselves to His Providence to suffer as long as He is glorified by our sufferings. This is the best means we can adopt, to obtain from God a deliverance from our painful trials.

You think God does not hear you, because He leaves you in the state of aridity and temptation, from which you have prayed to be delivered! This is not according to the teachings of religion. If your prayer is made with confidence, with submission and with perseverance, it will certainly be heard; Christ Himself has promised it. God may not grant the particular favor you ask for; He may see that it would be prejudicial to you, or less useful than other gifts which He intends to confer

upon you. Instead of the favor which you seek, but which His mercy witholds, He will give you graces that are more precious and more desirable, and which will enable you to practise the higher virtues of religion; graces which will enable you to merit heaven, by self-denial, mortification, submission, the spirit of penance; graces which will support you in your conflicts, and which will teach you your nothingness, convince you of your weakness, preserve you in Christian humility, the foundation of all true virtue, in watchfulness over yourself, and in continual union with God to solicit His help, the need of which you will more and more estimate.

This disposition of Providence is clearly pointed out to us by St. Paul. That great Apostle frequently entreated the Lord to deliver him from a humiliating temptation, which tormented him; but God permitted this temptation, lest, as the Apostle himself relates: "*The greatness of the revelations should lift me up.*" (2 Cor. xii, 7.) God refused to deliver him from his temptation, but assured him of His help. "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*" (2 Cor. xii, 9.) Therefore the refusal to grant the prayer of one who has been long tempted and troubled, does not argue, that God has turned from him, and abandoned him. It only proves that God's designs over him, are not according to his views, and that though He does not deliver him, He is ever ready to help him.

Chapter 13.

WE WOULD WISH THE ALMIGHTY TO DO ALL FOR US, AND TO GIVE US THE VICTORY WITHOUT ITS COSTING US ANYTHING: A PERNICIOUS ERROR, AN UNFAIR REQUEST, AND A COMMON CAUSE OF DISCOURAGEMENT.

"I SHOULD be satisfied," say some of those who complain that their petitions are not granted, "if I experienced the effects of this merciful Providence; but I do not see that God helps me to be more faithful to my duties." To throw light upon this difficulty, let us consult the truths of religion which ought to direct our judgments. Let us walk in the light of Faith, which should illumine us; we shall be able to prove that if you are not more faithful to your duties, it is not because God is wanting with you, but that you are wanting towards God.

According to religion, God will not work out our salvation without our own concurrence. He created us, without our own co-operation, but He will not save us without it. He requires that our preference for Him, be the choice of our own free-will. He has therefore put before us good and evil; life and death; and He has said: "Choose which you will." To incline us to good, He gives us light to see the motives for it; love, gratitude and future reward. He excites in us many feelings, which cause us to love what is good, and to

desire it. He thus forestalls us by His grace, and gives us aid in the hour of need. This is what God has promised us, and this He does. To correspond to all this, we must not lose sight of those motives and those feelings (which we too often do), but we must be imbued with them, we must ponder them, and be engrossed with them; and docile to the voice of the Holy Spirit, we must deny ourselves to follow His inspirations, for otherwise we can not do good, and obtain heaven.

Would you have reason to complain of a friend, who had given you wholesome advice to avoid an evil, but to whom you did not choose to listen, because to follow his advice would have entailed some little trouble upon you? Would it not justly be said of you, that you had suffered through your own fault? And yet this is what we daily witness. How frequently, fearing the labor we encounter, in fighting against our evil inclinations, we ask God to free us from them, but it would seem that the conditions are, that He is to do all, and it is to cost us nothing. We aspire to the miracle performed for a St. Paul. It seems as though we said: "If this inclination be displeasing to God, why does He not deliver me from it? Is He not able to do so? Why does He not change the feelings of my heart; He has changed others in a moment?" Waiting for this miracle to be performed in our favor, we meanwhile do nothing ourselves, and do not heed the voice of God whispering to

our soul. Such dispositions as you must see, are not apt to draw down upon us the mercy of God.

Whosoever expects to serve God without doing violence to himself, contradicts the words of Jesus Christ. Whosoever expects miracles to be performed in his favor, does not deserve to be heard at all.

Others, again, are free from such foolish presumption, and are kept back in the path of virtue from their over anxiety about their difficulties, and from their deep conviction that they can in nothing obtain merit; their whole mind is absorbed by this, and their only petition to God is to change their state. They hesitate to follow the lights and pious inclinations which God gives them, because not finding in themselves the particular graces which they are bent upon obtaining, and which they persist in asking for, they fear they are deceived. Thus the graces which they do receive, are rendered useless to them, either by their inattention to them, or by their opposition. Did they only profit by those graces, although not such as they asked for, they would soon obtain what they desire, but which they can not expect, so long as they resist God.

Let us study the providence of God, and the economy of His grace, and we shall clearly discern the snare of the tempter, who joining error to a want of fidelity, causes the soul to fall into discouragement.

Chapter 14.

DISCOURAGEMENT OCCURS BECAUSE WE WILL NOT PROFIT BY THE ORDINARY AID WHICH IS WITHIN OUR REACH, BUT THROUGH A SLOTHFUL FEELING, WAIT FOR EXTRAORDINARY GRACES.

It is always from want of instruction, or from inattention to that which we have received, that we are led to form unreasonable expectations. God's providence in regard to man is of two kinds: The first, is extraordinary and miraculous, in which He displays the wonders of His power. The second, is common and ordinary, in which He acts, as our reason can perceive, by means proportionate to the end which His wisdom proposes. The first is rare and passing. God employs it only for some especial design, but man to whom these motives are unknown, would be tempting God, were he to count on receiving it.

There is no doubt that the Almighty can perform miracles, but He has promised them to no one Therefore have we no reasonable right to expect them, either to help us in our wants or to guide us in our actions. If a man should refrain from making any effort to obtain the necessaries of life with the pretext that God can and does at times perform miracles, he would surely be looked upon as a madman. And is it less contrary to all the established principles of the Gospel, to count upon a

daily miracle in the order of Grace for the life of the soul?

The second kind of Providence is general, ordinary and constant for all men. If the Almighty has at times made use of the first, with regard to some, in changing them all at once, He has afterwards made them return to the common order, and treated them as the rest of mankind. Witness St. Paul, who, after being raised to the third heaven, "*brought his body under subjection, lest he should become a reprobate.*" (1 Cor. ix, 27.)

The common and ordinary providence of God leads us to the acquiring of virtue, and to a knowledge of the means which reason teaches us are necessary to succeed in our undertaking; and to employ them with the aid of religion, to the end for which man was created — God, and the happiness of possessing Him.

If we wish to succeed in any art or science, that desire naturally leads us to study its first principles with assiduity, and to engrave them so profoundly in our minds that they may be always present to us, whenever we engage in that occupation or study, in which we seek to perfect ourselves. We carefully avoid proceeding contrary to those principles, and should we fall into some mistake, instead of being discouraged, we redouble our efforts to repair it, as soon as possible. Look at the men who wish to succeed in their particular line — the artist, the professor, the magistrate; you will find them all

following the same path — resisting the wearisomeness of the first steps which are always tedious and repugnant, putting themselves to inconveniences, and overcoming the greatest difficulties. Such is the conduct of sensible men in all the affairs of life. They are incessantly occupied with them, and spare neither care nor trouble to succeed in them. Reason teaches the same truth to them all, and success justifies the wisdom of the means employed.

Such is also the ordinary providence of God for those who labor in the practice of virtue, and in the great affair of salvation — the means of success is the same; the motives only, and the end are different. In the affairs of life, it is some earthly and perishable good that we seek, and human motives impel us. In religion, the good we seek is celestial and eternal, and our motives are superhuman. It is God who inspires the desire, and it is His grace that assists our efforts.

God, then, wills us to desire the possession of eternal happiness; to strive for it, as for the essential end of our being; to perform those good works which may insure its attainment; to avoid carefully whatever may forfeit or endanger it. In short, He wishes us, in accordance with the dictates of true reason, supported by religious motives, to spare neither trouble, nor pain, nor any heavenly means at our command, to succeed in this pursuit. Eternity is here at stake.

The Almighty has chosen this order of Providence, in preference to any other which He might have determined, because He is the author of nature as well as of grace. He wished, thereby, to commit man to the necessity of working for his final happiness, instead of resigning himself to a listless indolence, which would deprive him of all desire or esteem for a benefit, that he would expect solely from God, working without his co-operation. He wished to leave man without excuse, if he failed to do for an eternal good what he daily does for perishable ends, for a passing pleasure, and if he neglected the dictates of reason, in that where it most concerned him to follow them.

It is thus that God, in His all-wise and merciful Providence, instead of making an open manifestation of His power, offers his divine grace to His creatures, to lead them in the path of faith, hope and love. Those lights, those feelings and desires, teaching you what God requires of you and leading you to accomplish that will, come not from yourself but from God. He is the author of them, and it is He who suggests them to you, and the means whereby to elevate them, in order that they may attain their end, which is your eternal salvation. To refuse, therefore, these lights and inspirations, because they are not what we ask of God, or for any other reason whatsoever, is to try to change the appointed order of His Providence,

and to reach Heaven by a path different from the one He has marked out for us.

What then must one do when tempted to discouragement? Acting on the principle, that we should not willingly lose a present good because we cannot obtain another which we covet, until God once more visits us with consolations, we should submit ourselves to His holy will, follow with docility the graces which we receive, and avail ourselves with gratitude of the light which is accorded to us. We shall then always find, in the common and ordinary path of divine Providence, all that we need to sustain us in the practice of virtue.

What justifies this principle of common prudence, and consecrates it in religious life, is that to follow this order of Providence, from which we should never swerve, it is not sufficient to avoid gross faults, if we neglect at the same time, if we omit or negligently practise the virtue which God asks of us, in the graces which He accords. The foolish virgins were excluded from the marriage feast because they were not found ready when the bridegroom was announced. (Matt. xxv.) The slothful servant was condemned, because he had not profited by the talent his master had entrusted to him. That talent is time, which God gives us; it is grace, which we so often receive, and of which we too often avail ourselves as little as of the time which we so carelessly squander. These striking examples should make a slothful and tepid person

enter into himself, and adhering to the order of Providence designed for him, endeavor to profit by the light and grace which are given for his sanctification.

Do not look upon this as mere human reasoning, it is what Christ teaches in His gospel, where He recommends vigilance and prayer, the renunciation of desires which are contrary to the will of God, care to avoid evil, and to flee from temptation. Hence, those Saints and Fathers of the Church, who, enlightened by the Spirit of God, have given rules for conducting souls to perfection, do not prescribe anything extraordinary. They are content to point out ordinary means, frequent prayer, spiritual reading, repeated examination of the conscience to ascertain and correct our faults, silence, which favors our union with God, and prevents dissipation, so fatal to the one whom it withdraws from God, that neglecting Him, he may follow, as his only guide, his evil desires and inclinations.

The more you examine these means, the more shall you find them conformable, not only to the gospel, but to reason. No matter how great may be our dryness, weariness, disgust and temptations, we can always make use of these means, which God will always strengthen by His grace, if we have recourse to Him with confidence.

Chapter 15.

IT IS FALSE AND DANGEROUS, TO THINK THAT WE CAN DO NOTHING TO RESIST CERTAIN INCLINATIONS AND HABITS WHICH OVERCOME US.

One of the illusions by which the devil casts some souls into despondency, or confirms them therein, is this, that certain of her inclinations and habits are so strongly rooted that they cannot overcome them. If you propose remedies for their correction, they will be so reluctant to adopt them as to declare, that it is out of their power, that it is utterly useless to make the attempt. Whilst in this disposition the lights and inspirations sent to them from Heaven, are rendered of no avail by their negligence or their resistance.

This is the excuse, but the real truth is, that they are unwilling to employ that violence against themselves which is necessary for their amendment. They do not ask of God the grace which they require, with a sincere desire of receiving it. They never go to the source of their difficulties, in order to apply the remedy which reason and religion prescribe. They seek to quiet their conscience by the assurance that they can do nothing to help themselves, and they indulge their inclination in a security which is highly prejudicial. At times, alarmed by their dangerous condition, they take a spasmodic resolution of returning to God, but because

they do not go to the root of the evil, and are averse to all painful exertion, they quickly tire of struggling against temptations, which continually beset them, and, at the first failure, resign themselves again to the conclusion that it is beyond their strength. Despondency once more gains possession, and they abandon even the wish to strive for victory.

This temptation is very dangerous, since it leads to a neglect of God and of final salvation. A soul so averse to all exertion, gives herself up to dissipation of mind and heart, so as to escape the sting of conscience, and to shut out the light which God, in His mercy, still grants to her, and which disturbs the false security in which she loves to dwell.

The greatest danger of this state is, that we scarcely dare pray for our conversion, forgetful that God is still full of goodness and mercy, and desires our salvation far more than we ourselves do. We forget His almighty power, who can, even then, defend and sustain us, and who will ever be faithful to His promise to succor those who appeal to Him with confidence. Unmindful of these truths, we forsake prayer, or engaging in it with the conviction that we shall not succeed, we voluntarily neglect that recollection, and stifle that hope which would render it efficacious.

It is singular, that a person instructed in the truths of religion should be caught in this snare.

Are we not taught, by revelation, that God does not command impossible things, nor punish us for that which we had not the power to avoid? God, it is true, commands a perfection which is beyond the strength of unassisted nature, but which, with the help of grace, has been practised, and is yet being practised by thousands like ourselves. He promises to assist us, as He has aided them, if, like them, we invoke Him with confidence, and if, like them, we employ those means to which He has attached the victory. "Why;" says St. Augustin, "can you not do that which so many others were able to do? Why can you not do that which so many have done, and are doing, with no more help than what God offers to you?" And elsewhere, the same holy doctor tells us to do that which is in our power, and to ask for that which is not, that we may be able to do it.

It is contrary, then, to the principles of religion, to say that it is impossible for you to overcome yourself with the assistance of those graces promised to you, if confidently solicited, and the use of those means indicated to you by divine Providence.

You say that you do employ these means, but that you are discouraged at seeing that, in spite of all your endeavors, you make no progress. You complain that, after all your attention, and efforts, and struggles, you find the same inclinations rising again within you, and almost as strong

as ever. And should you wonder at this? Can you free yourself in a few days from an inclination which is natural to you, or from a habit which your negligence has fostered? Besides, you should not judge of the progress which you are making in grace, by the continuance or diminution of the inclination which you wish to correct, but rather by the mastery which you are acquiring over it, in avoiding the faults into which you generally fall. This inclination, even though it continues to make itself felt, is not a sin. It is an exercise of your virtue; by resisting it you are meriting Heaven.

But every one knows, that the stronger the passion, and the older the habit, the greater must be our attention and vigilance over ourselves, and the greater our care, to neglect no means which may lie in our power to overcome it. Why is it that you cannot do to-day, what you could do yesterday? The reason is not very hard to find. Yesterday, absorbed in God, and animated by the desire of pleasing Him, you did violence to yourself, that you might follow His guidance and use the means which His prudence has provided, and to which He has attached His graces. To-day, tired of the combat, and forgetful of God, you desert the path marked out by His Providence, in order to indulge your sloth. It is your negligence which has given rise to this change of feeling. Return to your former disposition, and you will persevere in the practice of virtue.

Finally, why should you be discouraged and give up every thing, because you have relapsed into your old faults? That would be to throw away your whole fortune because you have lost a part. The whole world would cry out at such folly, where temporal wealth is concerned. These falls make known to you your weakness. If you reflect, as a reasonable creature and a Christian, you would be led at once to repair the damage which they have occasioned, and to guard yourself carefully against what may ensue, by an increase of confidence, of prayer, and of vigilance in avoiding all dangerous occasions. It is contrary to common sense to resolve to commit a hundred sins, by throwing away the means to avoid them, because, forsooth, you have fallen into one, which, being repaired by contrition, would cease to offer any obstacle to your sanctification.

Whilst we are satisfied that this reasoning is based on principles which cannot be denied, we still refuse to be convinced, because we are angry at our own weakness, and wounded in our self-esteem; we cannot bear the sight of our own humiliation. Dissipation alone can remove these disagreeable objects, and so we abandon ourselves to it in order to escape from ourselves. This impatience at the sight of our faults is a dangerous temptation. You should always resist it, and overcome it by humbly acknowledging your sin before God. Your sorrow may indeed be a salutary feel-

ing, which you can recognize in its effects. That which comes from God is humble, calm, and tranquil, and moves us to repair our fault, and return at once to God. If it has not these marks, if it is attended with anxiety, discouragement, a turning away from God, and from pious practices, then it is a temptation and a snare, and should not be indulged. Lift your mind and heart to God with confidence, and peace and order will soon be re-established in your soul. God does not dwell in disorder, He is not to be found there.

Chapter 16.

OUR SPIRITUAL EXERCISES A CAUSE OF REPUGNANCE, BECAUSE WE FALSELY THINK THEM USELESS, OR THE OCCASIONS OF NEW FAULTS.

It would seem that when this spirit of despondency takes possession of the soul, it deprives it of all light, and of all power of reflection. It seems especially bent on destroying the spirit of prayer, thereby exposing the soul to imminent danger of final loss. For, it is certain that we can not save ourselves without the assistance of grace, nor can we obtain that assistance without persevering in sincere and frequent prayer. Nothing is more highly recommended to us in spiritual books, than this means,

the source of all the others which God inspires us to employ.

There are those who regard this holy exercise as useless for them, because, through their habitual negligence, they enter on it with the conviction that they will perform it badly, and with their accustomed indifference. This is the first thought that presents itself to their mind, and, so far from resisting it as a Christian should, they grant it full admission.

In this disposition they enter on their prayer without confidence, with no will to offer God the homage which is due to Him, with no sense of His presence, with no interior preparation, and with no effort to free themselves from a dissipation which has taken entire possession of mind and heart, to the exclusion of all thoughts of God, and their salvation.

It is very certain that a prayer can not be meritorious which is destitute of those essential qualities which God requires in it, that it may be heard; and confidence is the first of those qualities. St. James says that he who prays should not hesitate, "*for he who wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is driven and carried about by the wind. Therefore, let not that man think that he will receive anything of the Lord.*" (St. Jam. i, 6, 7.) Still less shall he be heard, who does not merely hesitate, but ceases to hope for anything. Such persons, not attempting to overcome themselves, are only occupied

with useless thoughts; they are so indifferent that they do not even reflect upon the action in which they are engaged, and scarcely remember that they are praying. And if the action is one of obligation, as in hearing mass on Sundays, or holidays of obligation, or in reading the office, or in the reception of the sacrament, they fail in an essential duty with scarcely any self-reproach, thus giving rise to conscientious doubts concerning sacraments which they have approached without intention of amendment.

It is your personal experience, you say, that convinces you that you will continue to fail in prayer, notwithstanding all your good resolutions. But whence comes this experience? Let us examine into the first source of this negligence, which persists in spite of all your resolutions. Do you pretend that those resolves, which are frequently the creatures of the imagination, rather than of the will, should guard and protect you against your evil inclinations, without your taking any precaution to defend yourself against their solicitations, without your striving to overcome them, and whilst you are voluntarily abandoning yourself to their impulses?

You are all day occupied in natural gratifications and frivolous amusements, intent on seeing and hearing all that is said and done, losing no opportunity for useless conversations, listening to any evil report against your neighbor, entering into his bickerings, blaming some, censuring others on re-

ports which are often destitute of all foundation, giving way, on the least occasion, to feelings of jealousy and prejudice, always distracted, occupied with the actions and interests of others, without a thought for yourself, your eternal interests, and your salvation, prolonging this dissipation of mind and heart to the very beginning of your prayers, to which you hurry at the very last moment, and without stopping to reflect for an instant on what you are going to do; and you imagine that all this distraction and dissipation will suddenly disappear, and that recollection and devotion will as suddenly replace them, calm the tumult of your passions, and reawaken at once in your heart sentiments of faith, and piety, and love. In good sooth now, do you really expect such a miracle?

You have scarcely once thought of God during the day, you have not had towards Him those sentiments which are His due, you have shut your eyes to the light which He gave you, His graces you have neglected and rejected, that you might not be forced to look into yourself, and scrutinize your actions and their motives. And would you flatter yourself that in such a disposition, so wanting in fidelity, your past resolves will be sufficient to beget anew that confidence in Him, that tender love, and pious recollection, which are required for the holy exercise of prayer? Do you suppose that your thoughts unrestrained and wandering throughout the day, will suddenly fix and concentrate

themselves on God, withdraw themselves from so many objects to which they were chained, in order to dwell on subjects salutary, but, to the tepid soul, uninteresting?

This would be a miserable illusion, which reason herself points out, and which Religion loudly condemns. It would be contrary to the wisdom of Divine Providence, which wills to conduct us to heaven by means which shall be proportional to the end, by a desire for salvation, by meditating on the best path to pursue, by watching over ourselves so as to avoid whatever may imperil our salvation, and by the practice of those virtues which render it secure. It would be opposed to the teaching of Jesus Christ, in His Holy Gospel, where He inculcates so earnestly, recollection, observation, mortification, and earnestness in prayer. Judge now of what would be the consequences and result of your conduct, and of the extent of the illusion to which you are given over.

From this state there is no escape, except in undeceiving yourself on this point, and in making your resolutions more comprehensive.

When, entering into ourselves, we recognize that the measures we have adopted, have so far produced no effect, or but a passing one at most, must we on that account be depressed, and give way to the thought that we shall never succeed? By no means, since it would be unreasonable in one, who knows what God can and will do for the soul that

hopes in Him, and sincerely tries to be faithful in His service. What we should think is this, that we have adopted means and methods which were insufficient, and that we must select others which shall be more efficacious. Since by the result we recognize our want of success, we must search into the cause of our defeat. For, reason tells us that so long as the cause remains, the effect, suspended for a while, will be sure to return, and all the stronger, perhaps, that it has been resisted and restrained. Religion teaches us, moreover, that to cherish the cause when we have it in our power to remove it, is to remain willingly in the danger, and to expose ourselves to fall.

Now, in the case which we have supposed, the cause of all this difficulty in prayer, is generally speaking, dissipation of mind throughout the day, forgetfulness of God, and of our salvation. We live, so to speak, at hap-hazard; we perform our actions without any definite object or aim, with no religious motive, and without any reference to God. Such aims as we have, are human, founded only in nature, and but too often frivolous; we seek a satisfaction which is simply worthless, and our actions correspond to the lowness of our aims.

According to the teachings of Religion, our tendency should be towards the renunciation of self, the mortification of the spirit, of the will, and and of the senses, a contempt for all those petty

interests which the children of the world pursue with so much ardor.

Our actions should be prompted by motives which have, or may be made to have, some relation to God. We are here on earth, only to promote His glory, and everything which we do, should tend to this end. If God be not at the beginning and end of all our actions, if they are not accompanied by a pious intention, they do not contribute to our real happiness — they are useless.

Do you sincerely desire to rise from this state of tepidity and sloth, and to pray more easily, more piously, and with more fruit? Then, in the spirit of Faith, and in conformity with its truths, direct your resolutions to the maxims which I offer you. A forgetfulness of these truths was the cause of your evil, their application will be the remedy. Intent on your salvation, which you will then regard as your most important concern, you will be attentive to the lights and inspirations which God will communicate. Knowing the importance of those graces, you will no more neglect them, you will not give yourself up to dissipation in order to avoid them, you will thank God for them, you will cherish them, and co-operate with them faithfully.

These Christian subjects taking the place of your distracted fancies, will guard you from useless pre-occupation before the time of prayer, and will aid you when engaged in the necessary duties of your state, to recollect yourself when presenting

yourself before God. You will conform yourself to the order of Providence by your anxiety to make use of the means which God has appointed, you will there find an increase of grace. More intent on your relations to God, and to final salvation, you will walk with constancy, supported by grace, in the path of virtue, which leads to eternal happiness, from which you were withdrawn by your former conduct.

When once we have recognized this maxim, that to conquer our faults, we must attack them at the source, we should apply it on all occasions. Besides that dissipation of mind which leads us to omit our duties, or to perform them but imperfectly, there are other passions not so extensive in their consequences, which lead us into faults so frequently, as to discourage the unfaithful soul. These passions have all, for their parent, a self-love which we do not repress. It may be a prejudice, which induces us to undervalue the good qualities, and to exaggerate the least defects of an acquaintance, or such an attachment to our own will and judgment, that we would force the whole world to our own opinion; or, again, a restlessness of disposition that leads us to meddle with everything, and fix ourselves in nothing, or a haughtiness, a vain self-esteem, which resents the least slight, and would see the whole world at our feet; or — but who can enumerate all the passions of the human heart?

This we do know, that whatever the passion may be, that, in its undue ascendency, leads us to discouragement, we should at once set ourselves to work to destroy it, or at least to combat it without ceasing. An earnest desire for our salvation, to which it is an obstacle, frequent prayer, pious meditations on the maxims of the Gospel, the life of Jesus Christ, and of His Saints, these are means which Providence has provided us to stifle our passions, or so to weaken them, that they need not give us cause for fear. These means, when employed in the name of the Lord, are certain in their effect agreeably to His promise. Then, nothing is impossible, and nothing is useless. In the love which we conceive for our God, everything will turn to our good.

Behold the way laid open to you, the means that are given to your hand. If you do not succeed, it is your own fault, it is on account of your resistance to divine grace. Do not reproach God, but blame yourself alone.

Chapter 17.

IMPERFECT MOTIVES, JOINING THEMSELVES TO AN INTENTION OTHERWISE PURE, ARE ANOTHER SOURCE OF DISCOURAGEMENT.

THE necessity of acting in accordance with the divine will, so as to be pleasing to God, and deserving of man, is readily acknowledged; but many a one is held back from practising this salutary exercise, because when they are trying to direct their intention, the evil spirit, or their imagination insinuates other motives drawn from reason, self-love, human respect, or inclination. Notwithstanding, then, the offering which they are making to God, they are led to suspect that it is not for Him they act, but for their own satisfaction. The impression made by the natural motive is so vivid, and that made by the supernatural, seems so feeble, that judging the intention according to the sensibility of the impression, they decide that they are not performing the action for God's sake, and that it is therefore useless to offer it up to Him. They thus resign themselves to the merely human motives by which they are influenced. Discouraged by this temptation, which becomes more and more frequent, they no longer think of offering up anything to God, and become at once the dupe, and the victim of the father of lies, and of their own unfortunate illusion.

To correct our notions on this subject, we have only to consider that our human motives cause this vivid impression, not so much by their strength, as by the fact, that being in entire conformity with our nature and inclinations, we need no exterior help to enable us to understand and enjoy whatever they contain for our gratification, and because they find nothing in us to counteract the impressions which they excite. Supernatural motives, on the contrary, can not influence so sensibly, because, being beyond nature, and opposed to our own inclinations, we have need of God's help to overcome our rebellious passions, to appreciate their supernatural views, and to comprehend the advantages they present.

This help, which God always affords to those who pray for it with confidence, sometimes excites an impression equally sensible; but it is not always the case, for God is our sovereign Lord, and He imparts His gifts to His creatures according to His own will and merciful designs. His assistance always enables us to resist, if we wish it, the temptation that would withdraw us from Him, and if the sensible feeling of that assistance is consoling, it is never necessary, and not always useful. Even in worldly and temporal affairs we do not take, as safe guides, sentiments and feelings however vivid, which are opposed to reasons solid and convincing.

To judge, therefore, between contradictory motives for action, we should not be influenced by the

vividness of their impressions. We should consider the motives in themselves, compare their advantages and disadvantages, and then come to a decision, choosing those only in which we recognize a true and solid good. In this judgment we renounce all wrong motives, which we condemn, but as for those which are merely human and indifferent, we do not dwell upon them, we pass them by. With a will that disregards sensible impressions, we adhere to these supernatural motives which our sober judgment has pronounced to be good, and productive of our true happiness.

But you will tell me that it seems to you, on many occasions, as if your decision would have been precisely the same, whether you had God in view or not. Both my reason and my inclination, you will say, lead me to this course, and out of pure friendship I do what I would not do for all the world beside. In such cases have I not good reason to fear that my real motives are merely natural?

In such cases, especially if we give way to our imagination, I grant that we may be lead to doubt how far the supernatural motive influences our action. But even then, if we calmly resume the judgment which proclaimed its superiority and declared the relation which the action has to God, there can be no longer any doubt what part this relation should have in our conduct. That, delib-

erately adopted by the will, makes over the action wholly to God.

For God is, after all, the author of our intellect, and its suggestions, therefore, cannot, of themselves, vitiate the action. It is not opposed to the supernatural motive of doing the will of God, on the contrary, it agrees with it; why, then, should we think it necessary, in order to please God, to renounce the reason which He Himself has given? The less so, since it is often God that moves it, making use of that means to lead us to the practice of virtue.

All that we have to do, then, is to elevate this motive, by directing it to God; withdrawing it from the natural order, to place it, with the assistance of grace, in the supernatural order, by directing it to Heaven.

When our human motives contain nothing opposed to virtue, we both can and should offer to God the actions to which they lead. For instance, when, after rising early, and fasting for many hours, you are about to partake of your morning meal; when, after a whole morning spent in silence and recollection, you are about to take some recreation; when, after a hard day's work, you are going to seek repose, are there not many natural reasons that induce you to these same actions? And should these reasons, which are founded in nature, prevent you from offering the action to

God, and from elevating and sanctifying it by this voluntary intention?

Surely St. Paul was not ignorant of the human motives that induce us to take food, and yet he exhorts us to do it for the glory of God: "*Whether you eat or whether you drink, or whatsoever else you do, do it in the name of the Lord,*" evidently not deeming the natural incompatible with the supernatural motive. They do not even necessarily make the action imperfect, because they are not, in themselves, opposed to any virtue. And that which we do for the sake of a friend comes under the same principle. We frequently do things for our neighbor which God neither commands nor forbids. But if we do them, He wishes us to offer them up for His glory, as the end to which all our actions should tend.

But the pretexts for discouragement and despondency are innumerable. I feel, you will say, that if these natural reasons did not impel me, I would not perform this action, which nevertheless I know that God requires of me.

Why trouble yourself with this thought, which is nothing but a temptation? Do you believe it to be just and well founded? We are not inquiring now, what you would do if these natural reasons did not exist. It is always dangerous, as I have before said, to suppose yourself in circumstances in which God has not placed you. Banish this thought, it is only a snare of the tempter, who

wishes to discourage you, and to prevent you from doing a present good, by the fear of a future and uncertain evil. There is question now only of performing well the action in which we are engaged, by following the method which Religion prescribes. Apply yourself to calm reflection on the soundness of your present motives, with the firm confidence that, under different circumstances, if God permits them, He will also, according to His merciful promise, grant you graces proportioned to your trials. Would you yourself suggest such doubts to a person of a gentle and amiable character, serving God with ease and facility, and who should be troubled with the fear of not continuing in His service with the same courage, in case her character should suddenly become quick and passionate?

Among the motives which may influence us in the performance of works, good in themselves, there are some which are bad, because contrary to Christian virtue; those we must renounce, for they render our actions vicious. I have often noticed certain persons greatly troubled when they were trying to avoid giving scandal, because they feared they were acting through human respect. They did not understand the meaning of the words, and confounded ideas which are very different among themselves. To give good example is not acting through human respect. The former motive has regard to the honor and glory of God, which we

try to promote by not giving occasion to scandal. This motive leads us directly towards God; it is good and praiseworthy. Bad example is expressly forbidden; it is the scandal so distinctly denounced in the Gospel. In condemning the one, Jesus Christ commands the other: "*So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.*" (MATT. v, 16). He wishes us to animate them by our example.

Where there is human respect, on the contrary, there is no thought of God, but all is love of self. We seek to please those whose judgment we fear, whose esteem we covet, or whose censure we deprecate. Human respect leads us to bad, as readily as to good actions, according to the disposition of those whom we seek to gain, and that, too, in opposition, very often, to our own tastes and feelings.

These two feelings, then, are clearly different, and easily distinguishable. It would not be amiss if the former were a little more cultivated, especially in certain religious families and communities, where irregularities and bad examples are weakening good rules and customs.

What chiefly frightens you in these human motives, is that, in their absence, your action differs somewhat from that in which they second you. In order to decide on the reasonableness of your fears, you have only to examine your disposition under

these different circumstances. Does your perseverance depend exclusively on the presence of these motives? Then indeed have you reason to fear. But if it depends on some other cause, you have no reason for alarm.

When you are closely united to God in devotion, your mind and heart unagitated by passion, when you feel His presence sensibly, you do not need the support of these imperfect motives to enable you to resist your inclinations, or to perform some work of supererogation; or you renounce them when you perceive that they are of such a kind as to be rejected, and if not, then you elevate them by directing them to God. This is a proof that they are not the sole motives of your conduct.

It is true, that whilst you are living in dissipation of mind, and in a forgetfulness of God, you have some grounds to fear lest your actions should be solely prompted by natural feelings, or even by passion. But this does not justify your fear that such is always the case, since it proceeds only from the dissipation in which you are living, which causes you to forget the God to whom you pertain, the salvation for which you should strive, and the grace which you receive, but to neglect. It is an error to suppose, that what sways us in one set of circumstances, rules us also in all the situations in which we find ourselves. Our thoughts and feelings, in a state of recollection, are very different

from what they are when we are dissipated. Your fear is then unfounded, and you should not listen to it.

Moreover, why should you be alarmed because the motives which spring from reason, and from the natural virtues of friendship, gratitude, compassion, etc., precede in your mind and heart the direct recognition of God? I have already re-remarked, that sensible objects naturally excite corresponding sentiments; and that natural virtues come also from God, and are not opposed to those which Religion inspires and commands. They often serve to introduce these latter more easily into our heart. They create in us a disposition which, so far from opposing the tendency of virtue, causes us to practise it more willingly and easily. Hence, we are not obliged to repress or to renounce them, we have only to perfect them by directing them to Heaven, according to the principles of Religion. And, in such a case, is it harder for us to direct our attention to the honor and glory of God, and the accomplishment of His divine will? On the contrary, it is easier.

You should console yourself, and encourage yourself to perseverance, by the reflection that grace is a light given to us by God, that we may recognize supernatural good, an inspiration to embrace it. It acts within us without our perceiving it, and affords no certain sign of its presence. As we hope for it, so we must presume that we possess

it, after having prayed for it with confidence. We must then act as if we were assured of its possession, although we cannot be absolutely certain, since no one knows whether he be worthy of love or hatred.

From this method of God's influence within us, it follows that we may easily mistake for an operation of our own faculties, that which is in truth the effect of His grace, which enlightens us, and gives us sentiments that reason approves, and inspirations which lead us to the practice of virtue. So that what we hold to be merely natural, the fruit of our sagacity, or of our natural goodness of heart, is really the effect of a supernatural assistance which God imparts.

If, then, to obey the precept which calls upon you to direct every thing to God, you offer Him your actions, nothing will be wanting that you should obtain the recompense which He has promised. Your actions will be performed for God through the help of His grace; He will be their source, their end, and their reward. You will not be making a mistake then, when you offer them to Him, since you obey a law which He has revealed, and, in not doing so, you would render them useless, since they would not be performed with the view of pleasing Him. You do it according to the light which God has given you to follow, and you do not mock Him, when you do that which He inspires.

Chapter 18.

IT IS AN ERROR TO SUPPOSE THAT WE SHOULD NOT OFFER OUR ACTIONS TO GOD, BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT THAT PERFECTION WHICH WE DESIRE, OR THINK NECESSARY.

You tell me that you dare not offer your actions to God, because you have conceived so great an idea of the perfection which is required in an action before it can be worthy to be offered up to His divine majesty and infinite sanctity, whilst, at the same time, you do not perceive in yourself a determination to attain that perfection. You are led to suppose, that unless your actions are possessed of this perfection, they cannot please Him, and must necessarily be rejected. Influenced by this illusion, you offer up little or nothing to the Lord, and, losing sight of Him, you follow only your own inclinations; and because you are not disposed to conquer yourself in every thing, you conquer yourself in nothing.

Such a principle leads to nothing less than entire abandonment of heavenly things. Who will put himself to any trouble to please and glorify God, when he believes that God will reject his works unless they come invested with all that perfection which the saints are held to have practised?

This is the time to follow the advice of St. Augustine: "Do all that is in your power, and ask for that which is not, that you may be able to do

it." This great Saint differed very much from you, when he thus addressed his flock. It was because he remembered that God, our loving and merciful Father, knows perfectly well of what leaven we are made, always comes to our help, and assists us in proportion to our confidence.

No one is made perfect in a day. According to the plan of divine Providence, we grow in the science of salvation through the use of grace, as in natural sciences, by reducing the principles to practice. This practice becomes more perfect in proportion to its frequency, and the attention it receives. To an artist, who would not practise his art; to an orator, refusing to make a discourse, because they cannot equal the great masters of old, we should infallibly predict a total and inevitable failure. It is not enough to be acquainted with principles, we must apply them correctly. Exercise gradually develops talent. We must make many a daub before we produce a good painting. Persevering industry alone can correct the imperfections which we recognize in our work; experience proves this too conclusively to admit of a doubt. It is by reflecting on our faults that we learn to avoid them, and this we can do only by losing no time, setting ourselves resolutely to work, and not resting satisfied with idle theorizing.

In the science of the Saints, and in the practice of virtue, we need, beside industry and perseverance, particular assistance from God. If we desire

to please Him, we shall frequently ask His help, as the student has recourse to his master, but the principle remains the same. We shall never become perfect by a mere acquaintance with our rules, but by their application to our conduct. If we do not bring them to practice, we shall never attain perfection. I grant that in offering up our actions to God, we do not as yet make them perfect, but at least we divest them of many defects, and render them less imperfect in His sight. The sacrifice which we make to God in removing these faults will prove beneficial, both by the habit which we thus contract of overcoming ourselves, and by the graces with which the Holy Ghost will reward our docility to His inspirations.

Do then, whatever you can, and ask with confidence for what is beyond your power.

A person of quick temper, strongly attached to his own will and judgment, in his intercourse with others, will yield twenty times a day to the impatience and impetuousness of his character; nothing will restrain him but the thought that he should refer all his actions to God. This reflection, if he tries to entertain it, will sustain him, at least in ordinary occasions, and if at other times it fails of complete success, it will certainly moderate the outbreak, and prevent many things which charity condemns. If, on the other hand, it has no effect at all, he must ask pardon for having resisted divine grace. The fault itself may serve for his improve-

ment by humbling him before our Lord, and by the salutary reflections which he will take occasion to make on his quick temper, when, having entered into himself, he asks God pardon for his sin.

What we have here said in respect to impatience, may be equally well applied to everything else that renders our actions imperfect.

It is a fact, proved by experience, that we always derive benefit from this deliberate reference of our actions to God. The thought, "I will do this for the love of God," can not fail to make a salutary impression, to excite us to avoid the defects which creep into our best actions, and to sustain us in our interior struggles. If we are ever so little attentive to this practice, we shall see that our actions become less defective, and daily grow in perfection through the graces which we receive.

God always rewards the good will which we display in making use of the means which He has given for our sanctification. "*Walk before Me and be thou perfect*," said He to Abraham. (GEN. xvii, 1.) To walk in the presence of God, is to refer all our actions to Him.

But, you will say, when I offer up to God actions into which many imperfections, and even faults will necessarily enter, can I flatter myself that in spite of these, they will be accepted by Him and meet with reward?

I take for granted that notwithstanding the doubt, which arises from ignorance, you do not de-

liberately intend to commit those faults which you foresee, and dread. If in the course of the action you become weak, slothful, tepid and negligent, God will certainly reproach you for your negligence, and for your faults, but it will be as a tender father who pities your weakness. His reproaches will animate you to resist the sloth to which you have yielded, and in the infinite mercy with which He treats us, He will welcome the good will which you displayed, although the execution proved so imperfect.

A Christian then, humbly recognizes his weakness and inconstancy, renews his confidence and love, and redoubles his prayers in the hope that God will give him more grace to be faithful in future. He will be very far from rejecting the means of correcting himself. Let us repeat it again and again, he must do what he can, he must ask for what is not in his power, in the firm conviction that this means, which God has given him, if it fail to-day, will succeed to-morrow, or the next day, or the next week — but will certainly succeed, if he only persevere in its use.

Chapter 19.

A LOSS OF SENSIBLE DEVOTION, AN UNJUSTIFIABLE CAUSE OF DESPONDENCY.

When, by a particular disposition of Divine Providence, we have been favored for some time with sensible devotion, we are apt to yield to a despondency which we think well founded, when God changes in our regard, and ceases to visit us with consolations. A little reflection would secure us from this illusion.

It is not acting the part of a Christian, to yield to discouragement or despondency for such a cause. Is it for the sake of this spiritual sweetness, this sensible consolation, that we serve God? Does God deserve nothing from us on His own account alone? Are not the enjoyment of God, and of the eternal reward which He has promised to those who persevere, sufficient to sustain us? If not, and we are forced to acknowledge the sad truth, we should thank God for withdrawing His sensible graces; for we should have cause to fear that in serving Him, we were only seeking ourselves, forgetful of that glory which He requires at our hands.

If we fail in our resolutions under such circumstances, it is because, losing sight of God, and being no longer attracted by sensible consolations, we do not exercise ourselves sufficiently in acts of faith, hope and charity, of gratitude, and the de-

sire of belonging entirely to our Maker. But if our heart remains in this tepidity, it must either occupy itself with natural gratifications, or abandon itself to despondency, and lose all courage.

In whatever state your soul may be, faith is your only support, and must be your strength and consolation. Illumined by its light, you will perceive the snares which environ you, and the means to avoid them. The direction of a soul by faith, is much safer than that which relies on consolation. In the former, principles are ever the same, sure and unshaken; they are founded on truth and revelation, their consequences are readily perceived, as also the means which we must employ in their application. From these truths, that God the creator of the universe is the sovereign Lord of creatures, and their last end, that He created them only for His glory, that He died in order to procure them eternal happiness, we readily conclude that we must obey Him, refer all that we do to Him, and love Him above all things, no matter how He may dispose of us. These truths we may always find in Religion, if we are willing to perceive them; they always hold the same language to us, and expose us to no illusion. The principles are clear and certain, and there is no need of much reasoning to deduce their practical conclusions.

Sensible devotion, on the contrary, is subject to illusion. We may easily mistake a natural softening of the heart for a heavenly consolation. An

so, after having experienced the greatest sweetness in prayer, we remain with little strength or will to lead a life of greater recollection, mortification and regularity. Instances of this kind are not unfrequent.

As for those consolations, and that sensible devotion, which really come from God, and produce in our soul precious fruits of virtue and merit, they may be withdrawn. They are not necessary for salvation, and our Lord may deprive us of them in order to teach us that if, on the one hand, we should receive them with humility and gratitude, on the other we must not cling to them in such a way as to relax in our vigilance, and to be troubled at their withdrawal. In depriving us of them, God does not abandon us, He wishes only to prove and to purify our love for Him.

What is the conduct of one who, accustomed to be guided by sensible devotion, finds himself suddenly deprived of its consolations? He is without support, and knows not where to look for strength and encouragement. Little used to act from that charity which springs from Faith, he does not even think of adopting this means, the only one that remains, but of which he knows not the advantages. Troubled by his loss, he turns away from God by repeated infidelities, foolishly imagining that he is deserted in that which is only meant for a trial. Every difficulty is exaggerated, and he is soon in danger of entirely forsaking God.

If sensible consolations are more sweet and satisfactory, faith is more certain and meritorious. We should cling to it therefore, at all times, and under all circumstances. Enjoy the consolations which God may send you, but in your actions be guided by the principles of faith. You will then have nothing to change in your conduct, when the time of consolation ceases.

Chapter 20.

FAULTS COMMITTED BY PIOUS SOULS IN TIME OF DESOLATION.

Dryness and desolation are very trying to such as love God, and they cause many to fall into despondency. And yet their greatest trouble and danger spring from their own conduct under the trial. The first fault committed by such persons, is a want of confidence in prayer, neglecting it or practising it with indifference, at a time when they stand in the greatest need of its support. The difficulty which they experience is no reason for omitting those pious exercises, which duty, or their previous resolutions prescribe. We can not too frequently repeat that virtue consists in doing the will of God. Does He require that at a certain time we should be occupied in mental or vocal prayer, spiritual reading, or any other spiritual exercise, then we

must not fail to be there; it may be the very time appointed by Him for the end of our trial, we must go with confidence, with the desire and expectation of profiting by those graces which He will be sure to provide.

"But I do nothing when I am there," you will say; "overwhelmed with weariness, trouble and distractions, I have neither good thoughts, nor good desires. My mind is dark, and my heart is silent."

I know how trying this state is in the constant effort which it requires. But it is a consolation to know that you are doing the will of God, when you are there where He wishes you to be. He will not refuse to hear you, if you confidently ask for grace to bear with patience this state of wearisomeness, and disgust, and to persevere with fidelity, notwithstanding the trouble you experience; and if He still defer to send the relief which you implore, it is only in order to test your love, and increase your merit.

Then too, you do wrong to worry yourself on account of distractions. They are not faults, except in as much as you yield to them. If you overcome them as soon as you perceive them, your prayer is not the less agreeable to God, it becomes doubly meritorious, for you are exercising at once piety and mortification. True merit consists in overcoming difficulties in a spirit of faith and charity. Even though the distraction returns every

minute, continue to put it aside with the same fidelity, renewing again your sense of the presence of God, and you will have no ground for self-reproach. Lightness of mind distracts the heart in prayer, but, says St. Augustine, when we grieve at this weakness, and humble ourselves on its account, our prayer is not interrupted.

Religion is full of consolation to those who follow its principles, and observe the practices which it counsels or prescribes.

If in time of prayer we experience neither pious thoughts nor good sentiments, it may possibly be the result either of our trouble, or our sloth. We are disturbed at our condition, and when we are in this state, we can not reflect sufficiently to enable us to discover the proper remedies. We are in a manner blinded, not discerning or not attending to the means which present themselves confusedly to our mind, so as to seize and employ them. In our embarrassment, fear takes possession of our heart, and paralyzes its action, it presents the graces which God is disposed to give us, and places obstacles in the way of His bountiful goodness.

Sloth, on the other hand, holds us back from reflecting seriously on the principles of faith, that we may follow them, and causes us to weary of the struggle in which we are engaged. Then comes the thought that we have not the strength to persevere in this self-combat. We resign ourselves finally to a negligence, which renders our spiritual exercises

yet more difficult and distasteful, or we give them up entirely.

It is not difficult to find a remedy to both these evils. You must convince yourself that this state is not bad in itself, and that, as I have already shown you, it can be made very pleasing and meritorious before God. Why then should it disturb you? If you look only to Heaven, you should regard the condition of your soul as a great benefit, since it leads you there, and that too, more securely than one which would be more agreeable to nature and to self-love. Open your heart to that confidence which Religion inspires, and prepare to receive the succor which it furnishes. Accept this trial from the hand of the Lord, bear it with patience as long as He wills it, and offer it up to Him in a spirit of penance and expiation. Every one can, and every one must humble himself before God, in thus submitting to the interior trials to which he is subjected. As for holy thoughts which may unite you with God, your present state itself will suggest them. So soon as your trouble and anxiety shall have subsided, your thoughts will turn to Heaven from which your help must come.

Prayer becomes another subject of anxiety. The tempter sets this snare for you, that by making it a source of trouble, he may prevent you from deriving any advantage from its exercise. He seeks to draw you aside from the right path, by preventing you from following the inclination which God

gives you, that you may follow your own will in a kind of prayer which is your own choice, and to which you are not called, contrary to the well-approved maxim, that in all things, and especially in prayer, we must follow the inspiration of God.

If in prayer God suggests to us the contemplation of several virtues, so long as one is sufficient to engage our attention, we must not turn away to meditate another. So soon as that ceases to fix our thoughts, we must turn to the one which God suggests. But, as if it were necessary to occupy ourselves with only one subject, and it were impossible to attend usefully to several, a pious soul will often resist the inspiration, and attach himself obstinately to the first, which has ceased to furnish him matter for meditation, and in striving to do his own will, contrary to the will of God, he will exhaust himself in useless efforts.

God will attract another by prolonged contemplations on the great truths of Religion, wishing him to penetrate them that he may be guided by them in his conduct. But that is not the plan which he himself has devised. He wishes to be all affection for God, he is pleased with sentiments alone, and reflection wearies him. Leaving the path which God points out to him, he enters one where he can not find Him. He loses many a useful thought, to occupy himself in vain sentiments, productive of no good, because they are entirely

his own, and then complains that he can not apply himself to prayer.

A third wishes to follow the ordinary method of prayer, meditating on the subject which he has prepared, exciting the feelings which these reflections suggest, and taking the resolutions which seem appropriate. But this is not what God requires of him, He wishes to occupy his heart rather than his intellect. If he withdraws himself from the feelings which He excites, to give himself up to meditation, he will be assailed by a thousand distractions, especially if his imagination be very active, grasping the whole subject in a moment, and seeing everything, as it were, at a single glance. He will soon have neither salutary thoughts, nor devout sentiments, and tired of struggling with himself, in despair of success, he will either forsake prayer entirely, or pass the time in voluntary distractions.

He who despairs of finding the God he is seeking with all his heart, falls into despondency. Prayer becomes a task, and is abandoned. Note it well; this difficulty in occupying ourselves in heavenly things, is the consequence of resisting the will of God that we may follow our own. If we permitted ourselves to be lead by the Holy Spirit, our complaints would soon cease, in the ease with which we should perform our spiritual exercises, or in the benefit which we should derive from them in advancing to perfection.

The ordinary method is an excellent one, and that which we should follow in the commencement of our spiritual life. But when the spirit of God gives us a special attraction towards some other method of prayer, it is the advice of all spiritual directors, that we should not resist, but follow the inspiration, according to the saying of our Lord: "*The Spirit breatheth where He willeth.*" (JOHN iii, 8).

Chapter 21.

ONE OF OUR PRETEXTS FOR ABANDONING PRAYER IS THAT WE LOSE OUR TIME. THIS IS USUALLY FALSE, AND OFTEN CRIMINAL WHEN TRUE. HOW TO OCCUPY OURSELVES USEFULLY IN TIME OF PRAYER.

THERE are some persons who do not seem to have an attraction for any particular method of prayer. They prepare for their meditation by reading, or hearing some subject read from a book; but either they forget it or the matter does not prove sufficient for the time. In this case, they know not what to do. They soon begin to think that they are losing time which might be better employed elsewhere. Is it not better, they ask you, to obey this thought, than to spend the time devoted to prayer in doing nothing?

This temptation, for it is nothing else, is dangerous and hurtful, since it leads the soul away

from God, by an occupation undertaken in opposition to His will.

And how, I would ask in turn, can a pious soul make such a complaint? Should we not blush to acknowledge that we cannot occupy our thoughts with God? If sloth and self-love permit, let us enter into ourselves, examining in His holy presence, whether our feelings, motives, and conduct be conformable to our state, what the passions which sway us, the occasions which give rise to our faults, and then giving way to our sorrow for having offended Him, let us seek the means which may effect our amendment. Here is a subject which is ever at hand, which cannot easily be exhausted, which perhaps is one of the most useful we can select.

How many similar thoughts present themselves for our meditation! There is no one who cannot find among the lessons of religion, some familiar subject on which he can fix his attention.

With the publican, he may acknowledge himself unworthy of the goodness of God, implore His mercy, wonder at His patience in bearing with us, and humbly offer up his grateful thanks.

With Mary Magdalen, he may bow down at the feet of Jesus, weep with grief at the sight of his sins, and solicit His forgiveness. He may recall to his memory the benefits which he has received from the bounty of his Lord, creation, redemption, and that special Providence which has placed him in the Church, the only ark of safety; the goodness

with which He seeks us when we wander away, the patience with which He views our resistance of His grace, the sweetness with which He leads us back to the path from which we have strayed.

Such reflections as these, and numberless others, like them, based upon what we owe to God, and upon our relations with eternity would be sufficient to occupy us without difficulty, and without compelling us to remain in any one longer than we are able to draw fruit from it.

If our imagination be quick and lively, it will be more easily fixed by contemplating some sensible object in which we take interest. Our Lord Jesus Christ, God and man, is such an object, capable of exciting in the soul the liveliest interest. What utility may we not derive from this contemplation in prayer?

We may represent Him, to ourselves, teaching the multitudes, and we will dwell on the truths which He reveals. We may consider Him as He lived on earth; we see how intent He was on His Father's glory; His fidelity in accomplishing His will, however difficult or painful; His patience, His love for mankind, as shown in the humiliations and sufferings to which He submitted Himself for their sake. What examples for ourselves are to be found in all the virtues practised by our divine Saviour! These examples are all sufficient to strike the imagination, and employ it profitably,

if we will only take the pains to make their application to ourselves.

Our prayer is frequently performed in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. This should recall to our minds the sacrifice which Jesus makes of Himself on our altars; His dwelling in the tabernacle; the holy table to which He invites us, where He feeds us with His precious body and blood, and where He has so frequently united Himself to us so intimately and so perfectly. What thoughts and feelings will not be inspired by these prodigies of love, if we are ever so little diligent in their consideration! If, notwithstanding all this, our imagination still continues to wander, let us turn our eyes to the altar, where Jesus Christ reposes, fix them on the cross on which He is suspended, and we shall soon be drawn back to Him.

No matter what the condition in which your soul may be, always commence your prayer with the firm hope that it will prove for you a time of great merit. Since it is God that calls you to it, you will be sure to receive abundant graces in return for the sacrifice which you make of your will. Your confidence will give you that holy familiarity which you should have for a Father who is infinitely good; it will fill your heart with love, and console you in your troubles by the hope of reward. You will experience His assistance in resisting and overcoming your passions, which are the enemies of His glory, no less than of your hap-

piness. Do not allow yourself then to be troubled; do not listen to sloth, and fear nothing, since you are under the protection of a God, who is infinitely good, infinitely powerful, and ever faithful to His promises.

You will always find occupation for your thoughts, or in your struggles, the means of meriting eternal happiness.

Chapter 22.

TO STRIVE FOR SENSIBLE DEVOTION IS USELESS, OFTEN DANGEROUS, AND GIVES OCCASION FOR DESPONDENCY.

ANOTHER source of despondency is to be found in the efforts which we make to excite sensible devotion, efforts which call forth all our strength. We fancy that, without this sensibility, we cannot please God, as though He who scrutinises the heart, would take account of so equivocal a proof of piety; or as though our divine Saviour, in the agony of His desolation in the garden of Olives, had not been equally, as ever, pleasing to His heavenly Father.

If you are in such a state, learn that you will gain nothing by trying to raise yourself above the level of the graces which you have received. Instead of struggling for sensible devotion, which is withheld from you for the time being, be satisfied to fix your thoughts on God according to the

grace which He imparts. If He wishes you to walk in the light of faith alone, and reason, with no other feelings save what they inspire, you must continue in that way till He bid you change. Content yourself with regulating your conduct by the truths of Religion and the maxims of the gospel, humbling yourself before God on account of your transgressions, and adopting such resolutions and such means as shall enable you to avoid them. He will accept your sentiments, strengthen your resolutions, and reward them with His most precious graces.

This, you will say, is precisely what I do, and yet I feel that, in so doing, I have no love for God, that is, it seems to me that my heart has no part in the sentiments which my lips express. Sometimes, indeed, I find sentiments arising within me that are opposed to those which I could wish to have for Him, and hence my trouble, my weariness and discouragement.

If you will only examine this feeling calmly, you will soon be relieved. God requires only that our love for Him should be sincere. In order to be reassured concerning this sincerity, it is not necessary that your sentiments should be characterised by that sensibility which fills the heart with sweetness and rapture, it is sufficient that they should really exist in the soul, that is, in the reason, in the will; and you must judge of their sincerity by your readiness to reduce them to practice.

When this is the case, your feelings are true and sincere, and they will be supernatural if accompanied by divine grace.

There is nothing singular in all this. How often do we not find, in our intercourse with others, a true and sincere disposition to oblige, though unattended by that sensibility which accompanies a service rendered to a friend? And even when assisting a friend, is it not frequently without any pleasure or inclination, and not without a certain repugnance? And is not our service, in such a case, all the more praiseworthy? This is the instruction that we give to those who are preparing themselves for the Sacrament of Penance; it is not necessary, we tell them, that your contrition should be sensible, suffice it that it be sincere, in the resolution to lead a better life for the future.

Your complaint, therefore, of the absence of all sensible devotion, is without foundation, and the consequent despondency, unreasonable. Instead of troubling yourself you should only despise it. What you have to do is simply to have recourse to God, that your sentiments, being accompanied by His grace, may be rendered supernatural, and may want none of that perfection which He desires.

Sensible fervor in your spiritual exercises, in your love of God, or of your neighbor, is what God neither commands nor requires, since it is independent of your exertions. You cannot excite it with all your industry and all your efforts, a reason

which alone should suffice to console you in its absence. When the Lord sends it, it comes without an effort; if He withholds it, all our efforts would be in vain. You only weary your mind in the struggle to excite it; instead of increasing, you diminish the devotion which faith would otherwise inspire. Follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, wait till He visit you and do not forestall His movements except by your prayers.

That sensible fervor which softens and ravishes the heart, filling it with a rapture which some have been unable to support, is one of those graces, which are ordinarily the reward of interior mortification, graces which are means to perfection, but which God grants or withholds, according to the inscrutable designs of His providence. We may pray for this fervor and receive it with gratitude, but we must await it without impatience, enjoy it with moderation, and be prepared to give it up whenever God shall require the sacrifice.

We can, most assuredly, please God and entertain for Him sentiments which are real and sincere, without experiencing this sensible fervor, although occupied with thoughts which are the most capable of exciting it. In such meditations, it is sufficient to hold ourselves willing and determined to prefer God before all things else whatsoever. This feeling of love for God, may always be excited by appealing to the motives of faith, which are too well known to need repetition. As this charity is neces-

sary for salvation, God is always ready to assist us in eliciting it through His grace, when we implore it with confidence.

It is this sincerity of affection whereby we unite ourselves to God by the free choice of our will, that renders us pleasing in His eyes. Any one who lives the life of faith, can recognize this sincere determination in himself, in the means which he adopts, in accordance with the Gospel, to place and maintain himself in this disposition. I do not affirm that he can be absolutely certain, but that he may find evidence sufficiently strong to reassure him in this state of dryness, weariness and involuntary tepidity in which God allows him to remain, and to give hope that through His mercy it will conduce to his salvation.

And take notice that a soul which is visited with great sensible devotion, not knowing whether it is the operation of divine grace, is, no more than any other, assured of loving God sincerely and supernaturally. Your security therefore would not be greater were you possessed of this sensible fervor which you desire, and the absence of which causes you trouble and discouragement.

Nor must you be surprised if you perceive very sensibly the presence of feelings which are opposed to those which you desire to entertain; for this happens in every temptation.

The passions are always more quick and sensible in the feelings which they excite. We per-

ceive them more readily and vividly because they incline us towards sensible objects which are more conformed to our natural inclinations, and to the inspirations of self-love. This sensibility resides in our nature, and requires no exterior help.

On the contrary, a sensibility to the things of God, is an effect of His grace not accorded to all. The feelings excited by faith not being in accordance with our self-love, interfere with its inclinations. It is then not surprising that you should perceive a sensibility in the one case, and none in the other; unless God should Himself grant it to you. You should not therefore allow yourself to be troubled or frightened, but should act in this state of dryness, weariness and disgust as you do when subjected to any other temptation. After recommending yourself to the mercy of God, put away those feelings which disturb your union with Him, reflect on the motives which should lead you to Him, and make acts of that charity which faith and divine grace have imparted to your reason, and your will, rather than to your feelings. Force the temptation to leave you; you may have less consolation, but you will have more merit; and merit is far superior to consolation.

Chapter 23

ON THE USE OF SPIRITUAL BOOKS DURING TIME OF PRAYER, OR WHEN ATTENDING AT MASS.

THERE are some who, finding that their mind and heart furnish them nothing in this state of dryness, by which to unite themselves to God, have recourse to spiritual books to aid their recollection and preserve them from distractions. This means is sometimes good; for reading arrests and fixes the imagination. If occasionally it wander, it can be brought back to God, by the thoughts and sentiments contained in the book before us. But I think that we should not adopt this means hastily, nor without such precautions as are necessary to its utility.

In the first place, we must not have recourse to them through sloth, trying to avoid the difficulty of fixing our thoughts on God. Such a motive would only deprive you of His assistance, and prevent you from finding that recollection which you seek. To draw down upon yourself the mercy of the Lord, the motive of your action should be good, whereas this, on the contrary, is not.

Not only would you be disappointed in that which you intended, but you would moreover be subject to a new inconvenience. You would lose the habit of fixing your attention on heavenly thoughts, so that when deprived of spiritual books,

you would find yourself at a loss what to do during the time of prayer and mass. When before the blessed Sacrament, or in your chamber, you should wish to elevate your mind and heart to God, the same spirit of indolence would interpose to deter you. You should therefore employ this means only when, in spite of your good-will, and your efforts, the imagination continues to go astray, before you are aware of its wandering. God will then bless the care which you take to avoid forgetting Him even by involuntary distractions.

As we should in all things try to follow the customary order of Providence in things pertaining to our salvation, when you are reduced to the necessity of helping yourself by a spiritual book, you should select one which is conformable to the exercise in which you are engaged. It is the will of God that at that time you should be occupied in certain reflections or sentiments, and as we should not depart from that order of Providence, for which our graces are promised and prepared, you should take that book which is best adapted to aid you in fulfilling the duty.

Do not imitate such as during mass take up the first pious book that comes to hand, or that pleases their taste. Whilst they are reading a sermon, or some favorite author, and absorbed in their reading, the time passes away without their being aware that they are assisting at the holy sacrifice, or at least without their eliciting those pious sentiments

which this mystery of the love of Jesus for us, should inspire. How many graces are not lost by such conduct which testifies their indifference for their divine Redeemer immolated every day on the Altar? How can it be otherwise, since they ask Him nothing, at a time when He is unable to refuse them anything, having established the throne of His mercy, on the altar of His temple.

Besides, if such conduct were not exposed to this objection, it would still be contrary to the spirit of the Church. That loving mother of the faithful, careful of everything that may contribute to their salvation, exhorts them to unite themselves with the priest in offering this holy sacrifice to the Almighty Father. The consecration is the part of the priest alone, but the offertory which precedes it, is common to all the faithful, whom he invites to unite with him in soliciting the graces of Heaven upon the whole Church. "*Orate fratres;* pray, my brothers, that my sacrifice, and *yours*, may prove acceptable to God, the Almighty Father." To conform to this spirit you should, during mass, make use of books containing prayers suited to the different parts of the sacrifice, which may enable you to unite yourself with Jesus Christ in the different sentiments inspired by the sacrifice which He offers to His Father for your benefit; or by books, which in the considerations they contain concerning the Eucharist, enable you to produce appropriate acts of Faith, Hope, Love, and Grati-

tude. This sacrifice is the effect of love, and love can be repaid by love alone. Consult your own heart, and it will say: "it is strange that whilst Jesus Christ is working for you the most stupendous miracles, you should be doing nothing to testify your gratitude."

I do not pretend to say that it is absolutely necessary that you should hear mass in this manner. I know that to assist worthily at the holy sacrifice, it is sufficient that you should be engaged in prayer vocal or mental, in union of intention with the priest; but I assert that when we are obliged to have recourse to a book to aid us in recollection, we should rather select one which will best enable us to enter into the spirit of the holy exercise.

Do not say with those, whose thoughtlessness is observable in all things, that it is tiresome to be always repeating the same thing. The mass is not an amusement, in which we seek variety. It is the most holy, the most august, the most sublime act of our Religion. Its motives remain ever the same, and the sentiments which it inspires can not be repeated too frequently, or too deeply engraven on our heart. God always receives them with love, He never leaves them unrewarded.

Chapter 24.

WHAT BOOKS WE SHOULD USE DURING PRAYER, AND WHAT PLAN WE SHOULD ADOPT IN THEIR PERUSAL.

In using books during time of prayer, it is important to be careful in our choice, and to follow a useful plan in their perusal. There are books which contain meditations, in which the soul rises, as it were, to the very bosom of God, losing itself in His infinite perfections, and penetrating into the deepest and most hidden mysteries. These are not the books for one who asks a remedy for distraction. God alone can introduce us to this kind of contemplation, and when He calls us to it, we engage in it without difficulty. To strive for it of our own accord, and without being attracted to it by divine grace, would be an error and an illusion. Not God, but pride and presumption would become our guide in this extraordinary path. Self-love and self-esteem insinuating themselves into our prayer, would prevent us from deriving fruit for ourselves; they would separate us from God, instead of uniting us to Him, or in the supposition of our good faith, the uselessness of our efforts would lead to despondency.

It is to that meditation which is possible to every Christian soul, that I here allude. Prayer is intended not only to enlighten the mind concerning the truths of religion, and the extent of our

duties, but to stimulate the will to greater union with God through its affections, and to a practice of those virtues in which we find our sanctification. Of what use would it be to know our duties, if we do not strive, through religious motives, to love them, with a view to please God.

A book, therefore, which serves only for instruction, which does not propose the motives that excite the will to practise the resolutions suggested, would not be one suited to a time of prayer. Generally, it is not so much instruction that is wanted, as the will to put it in practice.

Practical books of meditation are what we need, those which combine reflection and sentiment, and which cause us to love our duty whilst making it known. With any others, we are in danger of losing the habit of the ordinary meditation, and of finding ourselves at a loss when we wish to reflect on the truths of Religion, to draw practical conclusions, or to form resolutions for the regulation of our conduct, because we have rendered this method unfamiliar, by the use of books which do not follow it.

Prayer is not a study, but a means of leading us to virtue by the motives which religion offers. It is not sufficient that we should be acquainted with our obligations, we must be attached to them through a desire of pleasing God.

If you wish to derive fruit from this holy exer-

cise, through the help of books, be careful not to read on, without occasional pauses. Meditation and spiritual reading are two different exercises. Meditation is intended to unite the heart with God; never lose sight of this truth. The heart is attached only through its own affections and sentiments; in books, you meet only the affections and sentiments of others. They will interest your mind, but will be foreign to your heart, unless you stop, from time to time, to reflect on the motives presented to you, and thus excite the heart to make them its own by reproducing them.

We do not sanctify ourselves by reading in a book the love which some one else had for God, but by that which we ourselves conceive and actuate.

From such reading you will come with a heart as empty as when you began, because it will have done nothing for itself. Prayer is more an exercise of the heart than of the intellect. Prayer, in which the heart has no part, is but the exterior of an edifice in which there is nothing within. And hence it is, that they who make use of books, and who do nothing but read them, arise from prayer, very well satisfied with themselves, perhaps, but as little recollected in spirit as they were before. They leave without having made any resolutions to serve God better in the future. The heart having done nothing towards its own reformation, resumes its inclinations, and continues to abandon

itself to their attraction. From prayer they run to dissipation, which they have not learned to renounce.

Read then, if you find difficulty in recollecting yourself in God, but read in a spirit of faith, and when you meet with reflections which you can apply to yourself, do not pass them lightly by; weigh them well, and engrave them deeply in your mind, that your heart may closely embrace them. They will serve to correct some defects, which they will make known to you, to confirm you in the love of virtues which you will find occasion to practise.

And if, in your reading, you find some good sentiments, do not think it enough to admire them, but try to make them your own. In the holy confidence, that through the mercy and grace of God, you too can be elevated to the perfection of sentiment which so many others have reached before you, stop and try to excite your heart to their reproduction, not once, but again and again, and in different ways, and for the different motives which the Holy Spirit will suggest, and do not leave them, so long as they serve to occupy your attention. If your imagination wander, return to your reading, and continue it after this method, never forgetting that books are not intended to encourage indolence, but to favor recollection.

If, on such occasions, God sends you some good thought, though it be not connected with what you

are reading, leave the book and pursue the thought; the Holy Spirit breathes where He chooseth!

Self-ease, always fearful of trouble, may suggest to you, that you should disregard the inspiration, and continue, in the hope of finding, farther on, something more useful to you. Do not listen to its suggestion; it is a snare of the enemy, who wishes to make you unfaithful to the grace which you have received, and to cause you to lose the fruit of your meditation.

The truths that we read, as those too which we meditate, make a salutary impression on our heart, in proportion only to the grace with which God accompanies them. He it is who speaks to the heart, and who renders fruitful the salutary thought. You should therefore read in a spirit of faith, of confidence and docility. God, who has been pleased to attract your attention at this moment, may not attach the same grace to that which you seek elsewhere, and your unfaithfulness may be the cause of loss. It will be your own fault if your prayer does not produce all the good that you had expected. The same temptations, moreover, may lead you to overlook the succeeding reflections as you did the first. Your meditation will prove to be only a spiritual reading, indifferently made, from which you will derive no advantage.

But, you object, if I stop in this way, I shall not have time to finish the points of the meditation.

And, pray, what necessity is there of considering them all, if one alone suffices to occupy you? Why should you abandon a thought which engages your attention in a salutary manner, in order to seek another which may not be so successful? Why leave a certain, to pursue an uncertain advantage? This would be listening to your own inconstancy, and not to the spirit of God.

In the reflection which you are desirous of passing by, you may find two things; either a defect to be overcome, or a virtue to be practised: or again, some fresh motive for loving God. The former may serve to your correction, and it may be, in some important point; the second should serve to increase your disposition to cultivate every virtue. Charity embraces all things, and if we remain so weak and imperfect, it is because we do not love sufficiently. Can you find anything better elsewhere?

Make use, then, of the grace which is offered to you. Never exchange certainty for uncertainty. Lean more to sentiment or feeling than to reflection. When the heart is united to God, the mind is more easily fixed, and the imagination less disposed to wander. Finally, it cannot be doubted, that to reach God and Heaven, we must follow His inspirations, and be guided by His Spirit. If He seems to abandon you, do not be afraid, remain firm and constant. Hope is a port of refuge, against

storms and tempests. Even though you were at the bottom of an abyss, God, in His mercy, would draw you out. No matter what our state may be, we must never allow ourselves to despair; and discouragement, when deliberate and voluntary, whatever may be the pretext, is as unreasonable as it is criminal.

A TREATISE

ON

TEMPTATIONS.

Chapter 1.

TEMPTATIONS, NO PROOF OF GOD'S HAVING ABANDONED US. IF SOMETIMES A MARK OF HIS ANGER, IT IS AN ANGER TEMPERED BY MERCY.

TEMPTATIONS trouble pious souls, and plunge the dissipated over the precipice. In order to prevent the evil which they may produce, it is well to give you the reasons for not fearing them, the principles by which you should be guided on different occasions, the way in which you should behave when assailed, and by which you may preserve yourself against their assaults, and finally, the advantages which you may derive from them.

A temptation is a thought, a feeling, an inclination, a tendency, which leads us to violate the law of God for our own satisfaction. They should neither trouble nor discourage a Christian soul. The devil declares war especially against those who

detest his rule, who fight against their passions, who are disciples of Jesus Christ, as much by their purity of love, as by the ineffaceable seal of regeneration, or against those who seriously think of throwing off the yoke which he has imposed upon them. In his attempts against them, he seeks only to make them renounce the love of Jesus Christ, to separate them from God by making them his partners in disobedience. This reflexion should prove the consolation of those who are tempted. It is their contradiction with him, the enemy of their salvation, their love for piety, and for the will of God, that draw upon them this persecution. A little perseverance will make them victorious, and will strengthen them in virtue.

Souls that are naturally timid, or whom the Lord has conducted, for a long time, by a cessation of passion, and the sweetness of peace, are apt to imagine that these temptations which, they sometimes experience, are signs of God's anger, and they even come to think themselves abandoned, when the temptation becomes strong and frequent. They cannot persuade themselves that God can look with a favorable eye upon a heart agitated by sentiments so opposed to virtue. This is the last resource of the enemy for the overthrow of a soul, which he has been unable to seduce by the empty pleasures of vice. He takes away that precious confidence which would sustain it against all the assaults of hell.

Such souls are grossly deceived. Those who are instructed, who are better acquainted with the ways of Providence, are not surprised at the struggle in which they are engaged. They have learned, from the Holy Ghost, that the life of man is a perpetual combat; that we are obliged to defend ourselves, without ceasing, from within, against our tastes, our inclinations, our self-love, domestic enemies who are ever ready to betray us by their snares and their suggestions; from without, against the influence of bad example, human respect, and the powers of hell, jealous of man's happiness and conspiring against him from the beginning of the world. They know that it is only by the victories which we gain through the assistance of grace, that we force our way to Heaven, and that, according to the Apostle: "*He also who strives for the mastery is not crowned except he strive lawfully.*" (II. Tim. ii, 5.)

St. Paul, although he prayed to be delivered from them, did not regard the temptations, which he continued to experience, as signs of God's having abandoned him. The Saints, so long and so violently attacked by the devil, even in the desert, and in the exercise of the severest penance, had not this idea of temptations. On the contrary, they always regarded them as the object of their struggles, and the subject of their merit. They knew what was said in the Holy Scripture: "*Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary*

that temptation should prove thee." (Tob. xii, 13.) This is the view that you too should take, it is the only one which is correct, according to the principles of Religion; and then you will no longer be troubled or discouraged.

But though temptations are no sign of our being forsaken, since God never entirely abandons man so long as he is alive; and although they are generally a trial of the just, yet they are sometimes the effect of divine justice, which punishes thereby our negligence in the divine service, the weakness of slothful and presumptuous souls, the indulgence of natural inclinations. But whether they be a punishment, or a trial, our submission in receiving them, and our fidelity in resisting them, must be still the same. From the most loving of Fathers, we cannot expect a justice unaccompanied by mercy. His grace always follows on prayer and confidence. He does not desire our destruction; He punishes us only to regain us. And so far from being discouraged, and troubled, we should be animated, in the combat, by the pardon which is extended to us, if, with an humble and contrite heart, we faithfully perform the penance which God imposes.

Chapter 2

TEMPTATIONS NO SIGN OF A DANGEROUS STATE OF THE SOUL, IN REGARD TO GOD AND SALVATION.

FREQUENT temptations may prove that the heart is subject to passions, and inclined to evil, but, when rejected, they do not indicate that it is bad, or separated from God. This inclination to evil, which we inherit from our birth, as a consequence of the sin of our first parents, is sometimes increased by the influence of the senses on the soul. They render us more or less subject to temptation, according as their impressions are more or less strong; and this being independent of our will, and not having its origin in the heart, does not indicate a vicious state. It is not the cause of this sensible disturbance; on the contrary, it suffers from it; and when, from its love for virtue, it corrects the inclination, strong as it may be, the heart certainly does not become the worse for the effort.

This resistance to temptation shows a Christian heart, displays its attachment to God, the protection which He affords it, and is a source of consolation and confidence. This resolution to resist the inclination that solicits it, comes from the divine goodness, which furnishes it graces, all the more powerful in proportion to its danger. It is poor reasoning to say: if my mind and heart were in a good condition, and well with God, should I have

these thoughts and feelings so opposed to Faith, to submission, to patience, which cause me such horror?

If these thoughts and feelings depended on your will, to have them, or not, you might, with some show of reason, deem yourself at enmity with God, when you recognize their presence. But it does not at all depend on yourself. These thoughts and feelings insinuate themselves silently, or violently possess themselves of your mind and heart, without consulting your will, and what is more, they endure in spite of your will, which would free itself of them, and uses every means for their expulsion. They are not, therefore, the result of your free will, they are not of your choosing, and they can decide nothing concerning the good state of your soul, or against its union with God and virtue.

The heart becomes attached to an object only through deliberation and voluntary action. It can, therefore, belong to God, although it is exposed to involuntary feelings which are contrary to virtue, and which it condemns. I may say more; the pain which it feels, the horror which it conceives at being thus assailed, are a decisive proof that it is faithful to its duty and to divine love. If it loved God less, if it feared and hated sin less, it would not experience this pain and trouble, and horror, it would listen to its inclinations, and satisfy its desires. It cannot have any surer mark of its

love for God, and the perseverance which He gives it in opposing its evil inclinations.

The greatest Saints have been subjected to this trial; St. Paul was not exempt from it; and yet they loved God very much. Our divine Saviour, the Saint of Saints, suffered himself to be tempted for our instruction. That which He willed to bear in his sacred humanity, could be neither a sin, nor even an imperfection, for He was as incapable of the one, as of the other. We can not then be guilty when we suffer it as He did, resisting it according to the measure of our strength.

Chapter 8.

IN TEMPTATION RECOURSE MUST BE HAD TO GOD. HE SUSTAINS US IN THE COMBAT, ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT PERCEIVE IT.

God sometimes sensibly guides the soul in these storms by which it is agitated. We then buffet courageously the impetuous flood of our passions. The vivid sense of God's presence, the desire of loving Him which we feel, animate us, and inspire us with confidence. But sometimes He conceals Himself; He seems to sleep, as He did in the bark of the disciples, when it was on the point of being submerged in the raging sea. On such occasions,

the soul is endangered by the excessive fear which seizes and paralyzes the heart.

And yet there is nothing to fear, if you will only lift your eyes to Heaven, from which succor must come, and if you make use of its assistance. When the disciples were in danger of perishing, they lost no time in useless lamentation; they did not, in childish fear, give up all care of the ship; they strove manfully with the storm, and turning to their Master, they implored His help. Jesus seemed asleep (MATT. viii, 24), and yet He directed, without their being aware of it, the means which they employed to escape shipwreck. So too, God, concealed as He is from sight, is not the less attentive to what is passing in your heart. To you it seems that the next moment will bring the wreck, and yet you make head against the storm.

The motives which inspire you, the feelings which animate you and prompt your actions almost without your perceiving it, the courage which, ever on the point of failing, is always reviving, the constancy with which you reject deceitful pleasures, the sinful pleasures offered by the enemy—from whom do they come? From yourself? Weak as you are, is this resistance yours alone? Does it not come from Jesus Christ, who, without making Himself perceived, affords you His powerful support, according to His word, that He would not "*suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able.*" (I. COR. x, 13.) Yes, when you think Him furthest

off, Jesus is in the midst of your heart. You think yourself forgotten, and you are, more than ever, present to His memory, because you are in need. He is present at your combats, as He was at that of St. Stephen (Acts vii, 55), and provided you do not lose confidence, He will make you victorious over your enemies, by preserving you from consenting to their wicked designs.

Chapter 4.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE WHETHER WE HAVE CONSENTED TO THE TEMPTATION.

We have not much difficulty in seeing that temptation is no evil, and that consent alone makes the sin. That which troubles and disquiets those whom God subjects to this painful trial, is the fear of offending God, and their ignorance of the principles by which they may reassure themselves, not being able to distinguish between temptation, and consenting to temptation. This uncertainty as to their consent, fills them with an anxiety which causes them great suffering, destroys their interior peace, and so weakens their confidence, as to prevent them from approaching God freely, and with confidence; and, in fine, throws them into an extreme despondency, utterly prostrating their

strength. A few reflections would suffice to clear their doubts, and enable them to come to a right decision.

We have not a complete command over our mind and our heart. We can not wholly prevent the intrusions of certain thoughts and feelings. Sometimes indeed they take such forcible possession of us, that we are led, without perceiving it, to pursue in spirit, the thought or design that thus presents itself. Our preoccupation is so great, that we hear and see nothing of what is passing around; we do not even remember how or when these thoughts or feelings commenced. Thus we often suddenly find ourselves, to our surprise, engaged in thoughts and feelings which are opposed to charity, or to other virtues, in projects of vanity, pride or self-love.

This state continues a longer or shorter time, according to the strength of the imagination, or the sensible impression which occasioned it, or until some circumstance arises to awaken the soul from this apparent enchantment. We then perceive, by reflection, the nature of our thoughts. If in this moment of self-consciousness, we condemn the thought or feeling, if we disavow it and strive to reject it, we may safely say that in all that went before, we were not to blame. The satisfaction which we experience in being freed from it, is a fresh proof that our will had no part in our revery.

In this preoccupation there was no deliberation, no choice on the part of the will. In order to offend God, it is necessary that the will should deliberately consent to something sinful, which it is free to reject. In the case we have supposed, there was neither freedom nor deliberation, hence, there could be no sin. Moreover, the promptness of their rejection, when consciousness returned, showed the good dispositions of the soul, and that it would not have admitted these thoughts and feelings, still less have dwelt on them, had reflection furnished the opportunity of accepting or rejecting them at will. We must then consider these temptations as beginning then only, when we became conscious of their presence. It is to this moment therefore, that our examination must be directed, and if we rejected them at that time, we may be at peace.

This abstraction may continue for a long time, as often happens at prayer, where we are carried away by distractions, which entirely absorb the soul. This circumstance does not make it voluntary or deliberate. It no more depends on our will to shorten the distraction, than it does to prevent it from coming at all; there is no more choice in the one, than in the other. There will be no more sin either, for as the preoccupation which comes unforeseen is blameless, so the length of time in which it remains unperceived, can not make it culpable. There should be no difficulty, therefore, in deciding these cases.

Chapter 5.

ON SHORT AND PASSING TEMPTATIONS.

TEMPTATIONS are generally perceived at once, or soon after they present themselves, and may differ in kind. Sometimes they are thoughts or feelings, which arise suddenly, and as quickly pass away. In such a case, we are sometimes at a loss to determine whether it was merely a temptation, or whether there was not sin. Its duration was so short, that although we turned away from it, we are unable to decide whether it was quickly enough to prevent consent.

In such circumstances, we may base our decision upon our ordinary sentiments and conduct. If we esteem, love and zealously practise the virtues against which these temptations are directed; if in our habitual disposition, we are free from any voluntary sin against these virtues; if in longer and more sustained temptations of the kind, we have been victorious in the struggle, we may prudently judge that those fading thoughts and feelings were merely temptations, and not sins; and that the rejection which banished them, had really forestalled consent.

The reason is, that when we act contrary to our habitual disposition, we must use a certain violence, which we can not but perceive. If, then, we are habitually such as I have supposed, our consent to

the temptation would not be a matter of ignorance, or of doubt. The impression which such a consent would have made, although but passing, would have caused itself to be felt. We may reassure ourselves then from the very fact that we are not certain of having yielded to the temptation. Our doubt itself proves that we may be certain, for had we really consented, we should not doubt.

All those who prescribe rules for persons who are troubled by temptations, are unanimous in advising them to despise these passing thoughts, and to pay as little attention to them as possible. The reason which they give, is the result of experience, which teaches us that if we neglect them, and pass them by in occupying ourselves with other things, they leave no impression, and return less frequently, or not at all; but, on the contrary, that if we attack them violently, if we subject them to a strict examination, and especially if we allow them to frighten us, we are only recalling what is already gone, we stop them, and give them strength in the pause which we force them to make in our mind. That which, had we despised it, would have been but as a passing shadow, or a fleeting gleam of lightning, becomes by the attention we give it, a devouring flame in our heart. It becomes an intrenched enemy, obstinate in the combat, and dangerous to the soul.

Temptation is like a coward, who seeks to feel his adversary. If he meets with undisguised con-

tempt, or firm resistance, he does not push the quarrel, and retires. But if he encounters timid compromise or coward fear, he takes advantage of the weakness, attacks with violence, and obliges his enemy to submit to his terms. We must then allow all such temptations to pass lightly by, and reserve our attention for useful objects. If when these thoughts arise, we simply turn our heart to God, in some aspiration of love and piety, they will be unable to do us any harm.

Chapter 6.

ON TEMPTATIONS WHICH ARE PERSISTENT AND TROUBLESOME, AND ON THOSE WHICH MAKE AN IMPRESSION ON OUR SENSES.

ORDINARILY, temptations are not so easily vanquished, and their attack is strong and continued. If they cease for a while, it is only to return to the charge. And as they agitate both mind and heart, a timid soul is apt to fear a sin, in feelings which we so frequently experience, and which seem to maintain a fixed dwelling in the bosom. The fear thus excited increases the feeling; the agitation in which the soul finds itself, the failure of its efforts to overcome the trouble, give rise to a despondency more dangerous than the temptation itself, since it

takes away the strength which is required for successful resistance.

Our conduct during the presence of the temptation, may serve to determine whether we are deserving of blame. And in the first place, to prevent ourselves from being overcome by doubts which are dangerous and unreasonable, we should return to the principles which we first established. The *feeling*, which is experienced in the moment of temptation, is not in itself a *voluntary consent.* It is only the bait with which the enemy hopes to gain the consent. He presents the object to the mind or fancy; that is a thought. He renders it pleasing to the desires or passions; that is a feeling, which is the natural consequence of the representation of the object. This feeling is more or less vivid according to the temperament of the individual, and the impression caused by the object. But all this is independent of the will, and precedes the consent.

To produce the consent, it is necessary that the will should deliberately adhere to this feeling, that it should approve it, attach itself to it, and agree to it. An idea may dwell in the mind, a feeling may exist in the heart, without being adopted by the will. It is thus that we resist, or reject the inspirations of the good spirit, as well as those of the bad. This first thought then, or feeling, which only proposes an object to our will, no more constitutes a sin, than it does a virtue; since these

consist in the choice which is made by the will, in finally attaching itself to either.

If then the soul, in the time of temptation, had recourse to God for the grace, of which it stood in need; if it renounced the feeling which was opposed to virtue, if it disapproved and rejected it, and abhorred all that the temptation proposed; if it sought to turn away the thought, by fixing the mind on some proper or useful object; then, even though it can not answer with certainty for its fidelity during each instant of the continuance of the trial, it may safely judge that all that it experienced, no matter how violent it appeared to be, or how long continued, was simply and merely a temptation, in which there was no fault.

God does not permit the soul to be tempted beyond its strength, as the Holy Ghost teaches us: "*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able; but will even make with temptation an issue, that ye may be able to bear.*" (I. Cor. x, 13.) He is never wanting to the one who does all he can to avoid sin. And it is certain that when we employ the means which Religion and experience point out, we can not reproach ourselves with negligence. We must then encourage the hope that He, who in His mercy gave us the fidelity to use the proper means, has also, according to His promise preserved us from falling. This reasoning must silence the anxious

doubts and fears, which may arise, when God has caused the calm to succeed the storm.

The temptation may be strong enough to excite bad impressions in our senses. They should not alarm us. What we have said of *feelings* or sentiments, is equally applicable to impressions or *sensations*. Sensible impressions do not depend on the will, which, not having the power to stop, or to banish them, is not responsible for their commencement, or their persistence. In such circumstances there is no sin, save in their approval or acceptance. So long as we regard them as the consequence of a temptation, which we combat and condemn, we do not approve them, and are not to blame. These impressions or sensations would only increase, were we to attend to them, and vainly strive to banish them. Since they are not sins, we must not allow them to trouble us. Our attention must be directed solely to driving away, from the mind and the heart, the temptation that causes them, and to guarding against the consent which it solicits.

Chapter 7.

ON TEMPTATIONS WHICH DISTURB US IN THE EXERCISE OF VIRTUES. WE MUST NOT ABANDON A GOOD WORK BECAUSE OF THE DEFECT, OR THE IMPERFECT MOTIVE WHICH ACCOMPANIES IT. WE MUST RENOUNCE THE ONE, AND PESEVERRE IN THE OTHER.

All these principles will serve to sustain and encourage the soul in certain temptations which are experieneed in the exercise of virtue. There are persons to whom the enemy does not dare to propose the abandonment of those virtues which lead to perfection; but he makes use of artifice to restrain them, and to fix them in a mediocrity which degenerates into negligence. When not engaged in spiritual exercises, he leaves them alone, but no sooner do they apply themselves to these, than he fills their imagination with a thousand ideas that disturb them.

In those who aspire to lead a life of perfection, without being deterred therefrom, either by human respect, or by the fear of the sacrifices which it entails, he inspires a secret pride in the fulfillment of their duties. This thought insinuates itself into all their occupations. It seems to them, as though in everything they sought the vain esteem of men, or their own self-satisfaction.

These temptations are so powerful in some, as to discourage, and altogether disconcert them.

Possessed with the idea, that on account of a want of purity of intention, all their sacrifice is without fruit, and without reward, they prefer to resist the inspirations of heaven; they interrupt their exercises of piety, and lead a life filled with imperfections, and with faults. Through a dread of the struggle in which they must engage, they omit the good works which God inspires, and thus in avoiding one snare, they fall into another.

If the temptation arises from useless occupations in which we engage, or from dangerous occasions not required by our state of life, there can be no doubt that we should abandon them in order to secure ourselves; but, on the other hand, it is equally certain that we must not, through fear of temptation, fail to perform our duty and follow the guidance of the spirit of God. Temptation is not of itself an evil, whereas it is surely an evil to be wanting in our duty, in that which God requires. If we allow ourselves to be influenced by this fear, and on that account abandon our exercises of piety, or the profit which attends a spirit of sacrifice, we are wanting in fidelity to grace; we deprive ourselves of that assistance which would enable us to advance in perfection, we place in the hand of our enemy a certain means of causing us to abandon successively all that we are bound to perform. He will take advantage of this empire which he is allowed to acquire, of this fear which he has succeeded in inspiring, and will lead us by degrees to

the neglect of the practices of Religion, of the Sacraments, of all that nourishes piety. Will a soul in such a state, without strength, without courage, afraid to seek in prayer and mortification the means of support, be able to resist successfully the assault of its enemy?

Let us not then fear such temptations, since as we have often said, the fault is not in them, but in our consenting to the evil which they propose. Those which are more enduring, we must encounter with confidence, and love of God. Those which are but passing thoughts, no matter how frequent, we must despise and forget, renewing our intention of doing the will of God in all our actions. Then, such temptations will bring with them no imperfections; they will even do us good, since they will cause a more frequent purifying of our intention. Thus shall good come from evil, and from a snare designed for our destruction, we shall derive a means for our sanctification.

Chapter 8.

TEMPTATIONS NOT TO BE REASONED WITH. MEANS OF BANISHING THEM.

THERE are certain passions which we can vanquish only by a direct attack; that is, by a conduct the reverse of what they suggest. Those which form the leading points of an unsubdued nature, are of this number. They who are subject to vanity, anger, susceptibility, and to quick and strong prejudices, can surmount these passions, only by practising on occasion the virtues which are directly opposed to them. They must not be satisfied with renouncing the feelings which those passions inspire, but they must mortify them by producing the opposite sentiments. If they seek only to avoid the occasions of their faults, they will not succeed in destroying the passion, and when they can no longer avoid the occasion, they will be almost certain to fall. It is by practising humility, meekness, by self-renunciation, and by attentions to those against whom we have a prejudice, that we give to those passions efficacious blows, to insure their defeat, and the complete victory of him who is faithful in resisting every attack.

On the other hand, nothing is more damaging than the conduct of certain persons in the time of temptation. They believe that they are guilty of a fault in case they fail to exhaust themselves in

reasoning down the suggestions of the temptation. They enter into a discussion with the passion which attacks them, and which is never without a specious reason for its justification. They engage in a combat that is long and doubtful, and which need not have lasted a minute, if they had refused to argue with their wily enemy, or which, at least, would have given them much less trouble to surmount. This is especially the case in temptations against Faith and Hope, or in sentiments opposed to Charity. They wish to assure themselves of their interior dispositions, by going directly against the temptation, and they only involve themselves in troublesome doubts and perplexities, and uselessly expose themselves to peril.

So soon as we reason with the temptation, particularly in difficult matters, or where difficulties are easily excited, and hard to answer for those who are not well informed in such matters, or in things which appeal to self-love, and which our natural malice approves, we are in the greatest danger of defeat. So it was, that Eve fell.

Temptations that enter the soul through the senses, and which offer a satisfaction that is in conformity with nature, excite a very strong impression. That which we oppose to it, not being appreciable to the senses, nor affecting our nature, has a much less impression, unless indeed it be strengthened by a very vivid faith. In the midst of our trouble, faith has frequently a difficulty in

making itself heard, and our resistance to the passion becomes very weak. Besides, in this sort of defense, the attention we give to the temptation keeps it alive and makes it more felt, so that every instant it seems to us that we have yielded our consent to its suggestions, and we become so troubled and dismayed as to be unable afterward to give a satisfactory account of our conduct.

In all such temptations, there is no surer way of defending ourselves, than simply to banish the thought by occupying our minds with some pious sentiment. If thoughts can intrude themselves without the consent of the will, the latter, on the other hand, can indirectly expel them, by obliging the mind to occupy itself with other objects. Nor is it necessary to select for this purpose, such as are opposed to the temptation which assails us, it being sufficient to disavow, or reject it by entertaining any thought or any act of virtue which may distract our attention, selecting in preference those which are to us most familiar, or most striking.

Some, easily moved by the sufferings of the God become man for our sake, place themselves at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ, who by the sacrifice of his life expiated our sins; there they conceive a new sorrow for their faults and omissions, and a new horror for whatever might crucify again in their hearts, their dear Lord and Master. Others, in imagination, fly for refuge within the

Sacred Heart of Jesus, imploring His mercy and protection, and by penetrating into His goodness and compassion for them, excite within themselves a gratitude, and a confidence which insure their fidelity. These, moved especially by the love displayed by Jesus in giving Himself to them in the Holy Eucharist, make use of the sentiments inspired by His infinite mercy, to withdraw their heart from everything that might offend so good a Lord. Those, imagining themselves at the moment in which they will be called upon to render an account to God, dwell upon the thought of Heaven and Hell. They ask themselves, "If I were just about to appear before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, how should I then wish to have acted?" Occupying themselves earnestly with these objects, so interesting to the Christian, and so capable of withdrawing man from sin, penetrated with truths, at once so touching, so striking, their heart becomes insensible to the temptation, and their mind ceases to entertain the thought.

There are few temptations which can persist long in the soul that, refusing to listen to, or discuss the imaginary reasons of passion, and animated by a lively confidence, turns to God in loving trust, and implores His help through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. This exercise of love for God, during the continuance of the temptation, is the best safeguard of the heart. It can never be overcome, so long as it sustains this sentiment.

To render it stronger and more enduring, the mind should recall the motives that are apt to nourish and increase it; the enemy will soon retire in confusion. A renewal of the attack should be met with the same defense.

It is desirable next to banish entirely from the mind and heart, the ideas and feelings which beget the danger. We shall do it most readily and surely by engaging ourselves in some other thoughts or occupations. Indeed there are occasions, especially when the temptation is unusually strong and obstinate, where it is desirable to take up some entertaining author, to engage in some bodily exercise, or to occupy ourselves earnestly in business, or the discharge of our household duties. Such occupations fix the attention and free the mind from the seductive pictures of the imagination. When peace and calm have returned, the mind and heart will be more at liberty to think of God, and to attach themselves to Him more closely.

A capital point in these combats, is the not allowing ourselves to be troubled, or to relax our confidence, and especially to resist the very first attack. When we are disturbed by fear, we know not where to turn for assistance, being in a manner struck with blindness. We do not think of seeking assistance; the heart knows not on what to resolve, since the intellect presents nothing to prompt its action. We may verify this in our daily experience, as well in temporal, as in spiritual things.

How often have we not beheld a man in sudden danger, palsied by fear, lose his presence of mind; in vain is a help tendered to him, he can not see it; he has safety at hand, and in seeking it, he turns his back upon it.

Show a bold front to the enemy, and you can then take surer measures to parry his blows, you will more readily perceive the means of conquering, and being more at ease, you will employ them with greater confidence. And, once more, what cause is there for fear? The devil can indeed suggest the most horrible sins, but can he oblige you to consent to them? That depends on your will, not on his. Why then be frightened at a result which lies completely at your own disposal? Why fear a consent, which with the assured assistance of grace, you can certainly refuse? Stand firm, and you have nothing to fear from an enemy, who can only conquer by your permission.

This courage will spring from your confidence in God, which you must be careful to sustain. When one is discouraged in temptation, he is already half overcome. His efforts are feeble, because unsupported by those graces which confidence attracts. How should they be granted when, through fear, there is no thought of imploring them? He no longer considers the goodness and power of a God who is able and willing to defend His child. And yet were he to ask with trusting faith, that power and goodness would be soon made

manifest. The confidence of the royal psalmist should be his: "*I will call upon the Lord; and I shall be saved from my enemies.*" (Ps. xvii, 4.)

"But," you may say, "how often have I not experienced my weakness in this temptation?" Yes, because you have always been wanting in confidence. Be firm then, and you will never fall. St. Peter walking on the waters at the command of Jesus Christ, began to sink, so soon as he commenced to doubt; he was saved only by a return to confidence, which gained for him the protection of his divine Master.

In temptations, especially in those which are generally violent, be on your guard at the first attack, and try to repress its first motions. If by a feeble defense, you allow the imagination to become excited, and the heart to be occupied, your negligence will serve to increase your weakness. A passion that is trifled with, soon gains the upper hand. It was only a spark, easily extinguished, it becomes a flame which consumes all the faculties of the soul. This advice is the more necessary in those temptations which are increased in violence, by the impression which they make on the senses. A special mercy is then required, to preserve us unharmed amidst the flames. Diligence in meeting the danger, would either have preserved you from the temptation, or would have assured you the protection of God, whereby you would have escaped without wound.

When anything occurs that is strange to our experience. we should at once consult our Confessor, and make known to him the new temptation. He will teach us what means we must employ to resist and banish the adversary. This act of humility and Christian simplicity draws down special graces from Heaven. Our Lord takes a special interest in the troubles of those who, according to the order of divine Providence, seek to walk in the paths of obedience. It often happens that such temptations never attack us a second time, when revealed at once to the Minister of God. If we conceal them in the hope that they will disappear, they gain time to fortify themselves, and become more difficult to overcome.

Chapter 9.

ON FREQUENT TEMPTATIONS. "IN TIME OF PEACE, PREPARE FOR WAR."

WHEN we are subject to frequent temptations, we must employ the intervals of attack, in preparing ourselves, and in gathering strength to resist. He who would make himself ready, only when assailed, is easily surprised, and readily defeated. "In time of peace, prepare for war," is a well-known maxim. We should not neglect its warning in our

spiritual combats, where defeat is so much more important than in temporal affairs, since thereby we are deprived of an eternal kingdom.

This preparation consists in leading a life of recollection. When we are leading a gay and distracted life, we do not pay proper attention to what is passing in our heart. Temptations advance very far before we find ourselves roused to a sense of danger. The mind being occupied with light and trifling things, finds a difficulty in reflecting seriously on the motives which Religion offers, to counteract the solicitations of passion. But in interior recollection, occupied with God and holy things, we see the enemy from afar; we use the proper precautions, and we find in our habitual thoughts and feelings, sufficient weapons for a successful defense. The mind occupied with the truths of faith, the heart habitually attached to virtue, are not so easily shaken by the false allurements of passion. The torch of Faith reveals the depth of the precipice to which the temptation leads, and filled with horror, we withdraw from the slippery descent. Assiduous prayer, the invocation of the Saints, and particularly of the Mother of God, open to us the treasures of Heaven, and procure for us those chosen graces which the dissipated soul does not even think of asking.

If this recollected life be accompanied by a frequent and careful frequentation of the Sacraments, we shall be still more secure. And even

though we sometimes yield to temptation, we should not therefore withdraw from the Sacraments, but on the contrary, approach them more frequently. The Sacrament of penance was established not only for the remission of actual sins, but also for conferring graces which may withhold us from others that we might commit, and fortify us against the passions which lead us into sin.

In abstaining from the Sacraments then, we deprive ourselves of these graces, and diminish our capacity for resistance. The more frequently we approach the Sacrament of penance, the greater is the horror which we conceive for sin. This horror, frequently renewed, becomes more rooted in the soul, more vivid in its effects, and fortifies it more powerfully in the moment of danger. Moreover, all the Theologians unite in saying, that when a person, who is very much inclined to mortal sin, has had the misfortune to fall, he should lose no time in being reconciled, since, being separated from God, and deprived of sanctifying grace, he remains in the greatest danger of committing the sin again, on a recurrence of the temptation. It is therefore very prejudicial to delay having recourse to the Sacrament of penance, and still more so to abandon it altogether, or for a time.

The Holy Communion, when we approach it after suitable preparation, is also a very powerful aid against temptation. We there receive Jesus Christ, the Saviour of souls. After having given

Himself to us, can we believe that He will refuse the graces which are necessary to preserve us in union with Him? If He enters our heart, is it not that He may confirm it in virtue? The Holy Council of Trent, speaking of the Holy Eucharist, says: "*Jesus Christ desired that this Sacrament should be received as the spiritual food of our souls, that it should nourish and strengthen them, . . . and should be an antidote, by which we should be delivered from our daily faults and preserved from mortal sin.*" (Sess. xiii, c. 2.) If there be any time in which we have pressing need of help, to confirm us in virtue, to strengthen us against the enemy of salvation, to preserve us from mortal sin, it is certainly then, when we are the object of frequent temptations. The celestial food, the powerful antidote are never more needed. To deprive ourselves voluntarily of that assistance, provided for such emergencies, would be to court peril, and tempt our weakness. Besides, when preparing ourselves for the Blessed Sacrament, we are absorbed in the thoughts suggested by the great event; our heart, occupied by the sentiments of piety which it strives to excite, recoils from temptation, and is attentive to exclude everything that may diminish the graces which it solicits. But of this point the Confessor is the proper judge; it is for him to prescribe what is to be done, lest in this we should be guided by illusions.

To all these safeguards against the temptations

to which we are exposed, we may add the exercise of penance. It obtains new graces; it humbles the spirit; it deadens the passions; it expiates our sins, our faults and negligences; it excites our fervor, and redoubles our vigilance. In this, however, there is need of discretion and judgment. We must not carry our mortification too far, for then it would be an excess, and prejudicial to our health, which Christian prudence commands us to preserve. The practice of mortification is beneficial against nearly all the passions; but there are temptations in which it may be hurtful to some persons, according to their character and temperament. To such, mortification must be forbidden; and they must do nothing of the kind, save by counsel and permission.

Chapter 10.

THE UTILITY OF TEMPTATIONS.

If temptations render us so unhappy, it is because we do not look upon them from the right point of view. We consider only the danger to which we are exposed, the evil to which we are drawn; we lose sight of the advantages which they confer; of the spiritual benefit which they can procure.

This ignorance, or this want of reflection, accounts for the little profit which we derive from these trials. The following considerations will serve to make us bear them more patiently, and will give us greater facility in overcoming them.

Temptations may be made to lead a Christian heart to the practice of the most solid virtues, and to the acquisition of great merits in Heaven. It is a great consolation to think that we can derive great advantages from the very enemies that assail us, and make them contribute to our happiness. Surely this thought should animate us in the hour of combat. It is the motive proposed to us by the Apostle St. James: "*Esteem it my brethren all joy, when ye shall fall into various trials,*" (Ep. i, c. 2) and he at once assigns the reason, "*knowing that the trying of your faith, worketh patience,*" and patience, he adds, worketh perfection.

Man does not sufficiently reflect upon himself; he does not know himself; he avoids self-examination, lest perchance he should recognize faults which would cause him to blush. All his attention is engaged in endeavoring to excuse his sins to himself, and to exaggerate his good qualities. From this foolish conduct spring that self-love so delicate, so sensitive, so touchy; that self-esteem, that presumption, which exposes him to so many dangers; that vanity, that preference which he gives himself over others. Pride, the source of all evils, blinds him to his defects, to his falls, and to his weakness.

Even pious persons are not exempt from this self-complacency, this gloating on one's virtues, this hunger for esteem, which are so natural to man. It is a secret spring of pride and vanity, which exalts them in their own eyes, puffs them up with satisfaction, leads them to rely on their own strength, and keeps them in a rash and dangerous feeling of security. It is a subtle poison that infects actions which are, in appearance, most holy.

Temptations are a sovereign remedy against this dangerous evil, and its pernicious consequences. They reveal to man the interior of his own heart; they show him what he is, when left to himself; they tear away all concealment, and all disguise. By the light of their gloomy torch, he sees his misery, his weakness, his corruption. Attacked alternately by the different passions, by envy, jealousy, hatred, vengeance, and by others, lower yet and more degrading, he sees in his heart the germs of all those disorders into which others have fallen, and he is at last persuaded that his nature is not superior to theirs.

The first effect produced in us by such a sight, is to inspire a humility proportioned to the misery which is thereby made known, where there is subject only for humiliation and contempt. The complacency which we might feel at the sight of certain good qualities which we possess, is soon lowered by that crowd of evil inclinations against which we must wage unceasing warfare. We see

ourselves such as we should appear to men, were our heart with all its passions unveiled to their contemplation. We feel for ourselves a Christian contempt, humility before God, and, at least, equality with other men.

What advantages could we not derive from this self-knowledge, accompanied by the spirit of religion? Are we suffering — submissive to the designs of Providence, we acknowledge that God is lenient towards us, and does not treat us as the corruption of our heart deserves? Are we happy and consoled — we adore the goodness of God who is so indulgent to His unworthy creature. The contrast of our unworthiness, and the divine goodness, excites the most lively gratitude and inspires a more perfect love. With the conviction that we are unworthy of the benefits which we receive at His hands, and which flow from His infinite mercy, we strive to deepen still more our humility, that virtue at once so necessary, and the mother of so many other virtues.

One to whom temptations have revealed all the corruption of his heart, experiences, alone with God, the same confusion which he would suffer before men to whom it should be known. It is a salutary confusion which should be preserved. Hereafter, guided by the spirit of religion, he will not be irritated by the conduct of others, rough and disagreeable though it be. The light of Faith shows him that he merits even more contempt than

he receives, and if he does not meet with more, it is because he is not thoroughly known to others, or their charity blinds them to that which they might otherwise perceive. Is anything more needed to destroy forever his self-complacency and esteem!

Chapter 11.

THE SUBJECT CONTINUED. ONE WHO IS SUBJECT TO TEMPTATIONS AND DESIROUS OF SAVING HIS SOUL, ATTACHES HIMSELF THE MORE CLOSELY TO GOD, AND EXERCISES THE GREATER VIGILANCE.

THE knowledge which temptations give of the interior, produces another effect which rightly followed up, leads to perfection. One who is subject to temptations, and yet desirous of being saved, attaches himself more closely to God, and is excited to greater vigilance over himself, two great means of advancing rapidly in the path of sanctity.

He sees in his heart a number of enemies, he knows his own weakness; and although he feels that with ordinary grace, he has sufficient resolution to overcome some, yet against others to which he is more violently drawn, and in certain occasions of greater peril—he is convinced from his own weakness, from a sorrowful experience, and from a knowledge of the principles of his religion, that

without special graces, he will not have the courage to resist successfully. Knowing these things, and alarmed at the unequal struggle, what is he to do? He must seek help powerful enough to sustain him against his enemies, and particularly against those whom he most fears. Faith teaches him that this assistance is to be found only in God, and that to obtain it, he has only to implore it fervently and perseveringly. To Him then does he turn with entire confidence.

At the first movement of the temptation, he says with the Psalmist, "*I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me,*" (Ps. cxx, 1) he solicits it by his prayers; he attracts it by his desires; all the aspirations of his heart are eloquent to obtain it. The more the temptation presses him, the more he attaches himself to God. He is like a child walking along the margin of fearful precipices, or surrounded by ferocious beasts of prey, he clings to his father for protection, whenever the path grows slippery and dangerous, or when the fierce growl, or the fiery eye warns him of mortal peril.

Under the protection of God, like the Royal Prophet, he ceases to fear enemies who are powerless against a strong faith pointing to eternal happiness, and a firm hope which gains those especial gifts promised to implicit confidence. He no longer regards the enemy whom he had thought well nigh invincible; he despises him, or attacks

him with confidence, and in such dispositions he meets with an easy victory. This grace frequently renewed, teaches him all the more the extent of God's goodness and mercy in his regard, and in return his love grows fervent and strong. Temptations, then, properly understood, and met according to the spirit of Religion, attach us more closely to God by the great virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, of which they oblige us to the frequent exercise.

On the other hand, the conviction of our weakness inevitably excites us to greater vigilance. A weak man is a timid man—timid in proportion to his weakness. That weakness makes him very careful not to make to himself enemies, and to avoid the anger of those whom he has already made. He is attentive to his own behavior, and weighs every word. Doubtful of his own strength, he seeks to attack no one. This conduct is but a figure of the precaution which a Christian should take. He avoids with care whatever may excite the temptations to which he is subject, whatever may give rise to new and untried dangers. He knows who it is that says, "*He that loveth danger shall perish in it.*" (Eccle. iii, 27.) In the fear of being left to his own weakness, by rendering himself, through presumption, unworthy of the assistance of heaven, he is all attention to what passes in his mind and heart, lest some new enemy should creep in, or lest those already there con-

cealed, taking advantage of his negligence, should take him by surprise, gain him with the poisoned sweetness of passion, and force him to the precipice.

Vigilance is the more necessary, because the temptation is not unfrequently disguised. It uses stratagem, it alleges false pretexts, it takes upon itself the appearance of virtue, so as to draw the soul quietly to the fatal trap. Passion often conceals itself, lest it should be recognized. It will insinuate itself insensibly into the heart, and disguise itself, so as to enter unperceived. He who is inattentive to its approach, gives it time to fortify itself, or fails to erect a barrier strong enough to resist its attack. On the contrary, he who is exercised in the spiritual warfare, and aware of the danger of new temptations, or of giving the slightest way to the old, is always on the alert to detect the slightest movement of his heart. He examines the nature of his feelings, and no sooner does he perceive the enemy than he challenges him, and stands to his own defense.

And this vigilance is an assured bulwark against temptations, whether from without, or from within. With it, there can be no surprise, and the enemy finds the garrison prepared at all points.

In time of peace and calm, precaution is regarded as superfluous. But in time of war, or in the midst of the tempest, we must be vigilant, to escape shipwreck or defeat. And so it is that fre-

quency of temptation begets vigilance, and vigilance causes a stricter union with God, and from this union springs docility to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, and docility leads us in the path of perfection.

Chapter 12.

THE GOOD EFFECTS OF TEMPTATION IN NEGLIGENT SOULS.

TEMPTATIONS which seemed destined to be the certain ruin of negligent souls, have not unfrequently been a Heaven-provided means of rescuing them from the tepidity in which they lived, and of leading them to the fervent practice of virtue. There are persons who live a life of languishing piety. No marked disorder is visible in their general conduct, but neither is there any endeavor after perfection. If they do not commit any of those mortal offenses which cut us off from God, neither do they do any great good, through their indifference to the mortification of the senses, their indulgence of every feeling and inclination not manifestly sinful, and their habitual disregard of the persistent principle of faith. Their lives having so little of the supernatural, are but indifferently meritorious in the sight of God. They are vessels becalmed on their voyage to Heaven.

Well, God sends a storm to break the idle calm. Temptation comes to awake slumbering piety, and God enlightening them as to their state, draws them kindly to him by his grace. They see themselves on the eve of perils from which they shrink affrighted. They find themselves beset by enemies alternately employing charms and fears, to seduce, or to intimidate. Religion then makes herself known in all her strength. Alarmed at the danger, they have recourse to God, in whom alone they can have confidence of a favorable issue to the combat. If the assaults are renewed, they think seriously and resolutely of employing all the means which faith can offer, to escape the impending ruin.

Henceforth, earnest in prayer, by which they hope to obtain the required strength; united with God, to whom a lively sense of danger has recalled them; watchful over themselves, so as not to fall into the snares prepared for them; they act only from motives of piety, and live in the continual exercise of virtue. All that they desire, all they do, is offered up as an act of homage to God. The more they are assailed by temptations, the more firmly do they determine to continue in the path which alone conducts to a place of safety. From a life of tepidity, they enter on a life of fervor, in which every moment is consecrated to God.

This change necessarily takes place in us, if we are faithful to grace. For, attacked by temptations,

seeing our salvation at stake, and wishing to avoid a loss which is irreparable, however slightly we may reason from the principles of faith, we cannot but recognize that it would be presumption, and a very sinful presumption, to expect a victory from the hands of God, which we take no steps to insure. To live a tepid and dissipated life, to omit, or negligently to perform our accustomed exercises of piety; to approach the Sacraments rarely and with but little preparation; to be careless about the commission of venial sins, and yet to expect from the mercy of God the grace to resist our passions, is only to tempt Him, to render ourselves unworthy of His assistance, to deserve that we should be abandoned to our own weakness, and become the slave of sin.

With such dispositions, a tepid and negligent soul cannot be said, with justice, really to intend resistance; for to wish the end whilst we reject the means, is not to wish at all. God must then say as he said to His chosen people: "*Destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in me.*" (OSEAS, xiii, 9.) It is not of such that I treat, but rather of those who, in spite of their tepidity, fear sin, and love God enough, to shrink from a mortal offense, and to adopt the means which are necessary for their preservation. To such souls temptations are very useful, arousing them from their sloth, and exciting their fervor.

Those who treat of the spiritual life, teach us that God sometimes permits a tepid soul to fall into some grievous fault, in order to rouse it from its lethargy, by the remorse which follows sin.

Chapter 13.

THE TIME SPENT IN OVERCOMING TEMPTATION, IS NOT TIME LOST.

SOME persons much subject to temptations, lament the time which they spend in resisting them. I can not, they say, preserve recollection. When I try to meditate, to recite some prayers, to spend some few moments in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, I can not fix my mind on God. That is the very time that temptations come to assail me; and I pass it in a vain endeavor to banish them. I meet these troublesome and obstinate visitors even at the Holy Table, when I go to receive my Lord, and my God. What profit can I expect from pious exercises performed in such a manner?

This thought brings great discouragement. To cure this, to reassure and console such persons, it is important to recall to them the principles by which to correct their error, and the advantages of such a state when borne as it should be.

It is a maxim universally acknowledged, that

we are not called to serve God according to our own feelings and inclinations, but in the way which He requires, and according to His good will. God attaches His graces and rewards, not precisely to the good works which we prescribe for ourselves, but to those which He authorizes and enjoins. It is on this principle that is based the decision, that if obedience prescribes an employment which keeps us from prayer or meditation, by performing the action in a spirit of recollection, we please God just as much, as if we had spent the time in communion with Him. And if we were to omit the action for the sake of praying or meditating, we should not be serving God as He requires, we should offend, instead of serving Him. This principle should suffice to convince you that you do not lose the time which you pass in resisting temptations, that occur during your exercises of piety. The devil has no more power over men than God allows to him. It was only by an express permission that he was enabled to subject the patient Job to so many trials and temptations. God then permits this state in which you find yourself; and as distractions are a species of temptation, you must apply to them what I have just been saying.

How then does God wish that you should serve Him? Is it by a sustained and uninterrupted meditation on holy things? Is it by tender colloquies with Himself, which no earthly affection shall be allowed to disturb? Not so; He wishes you to

serve Him by a faithful and persevering resistance to all the inspirations of the enemy, by which He strives to seduce and separate you from the divine love; that, like the Jews rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, one hand should grasp the sword of defensive warfare, whilst the other labors to erect the spiritual edifice of perfection in a sentiment of lively faith and unshaken hope; a hope, I mean, unshaken in your will, however it may seem to waver in your imagination. Has such been your fidelity? Then you have done the will of God; you have honored Him as He required; you have put Him above everything else; you have in your submission, and patience, and fidelity in resisting temptation, been as pleasing to Him as though you had been occupied in an ecstacy of fervent prayer, distinguished by the most affectionate sentiments.

I ask you, how can that time be lost, which is spent in conformity to the will of God, and in the exhibition of an attachment to Him so marked and solid? After such an exercise, in which you have courageously resisted all the attacks of your enemies, you should be as well satisfied, as if you had performed it in the greatest recollection and tranquillity. It had less savor and sweetness, but the fruit was all the richer. You have done the will of God, and He will acknowledge it, in the graces with which He will enrich your soul. The accomplishment of that will was painful; the pain will not be forgotten in the recompense. The Holy

Ghost assures us by the mouth of the Apostle: "*God is not unjust, to forget your work, and the love which ye have shown in His name.*" (HEB. vi, 10.)

The time, therefore, so employed, is not lost, not only because we render God the honor and service which He asks at our hands, and in the very way He asks it; but, also, because in these combats we acquire merits which are being multiplied in every minute. Persecutions that increased the sufferings of the Martyrs, enriched their crown of triumph; temptations are a persecution that has the same effect in a faithful soul.

The Holy Ghost declares him blessed, who "*could have transgressed, and hath not transgressed; who could do evil things, and hath not done them.*" (ECCLI. xxxi, 10.) His happiness is proportioned to the merit which he amassed by his perseverance. On this principle, when you observe the law of God, and do His will in a way that is displeasing to nature, you acquire a double claim to reward: first, you have obeyed, and secondly, you have obeyed with difficulty, and against resistance and combat. The sacrifice which you have made of the natural inclination which solicited and impelled you, is rewarded here by new graces, and hereafter by an increase of eternal glory and happiness.

Following up this reasoning, what an immense treasure of merit that person accumulates, who assailed by all kinds of temptations is steadfast in

clinging to God! He is certain that every sacrifice was noted, every one had its merit, every one shall have its recompense. On each several occasion that he resisted temptation, it could be said of him, "*blessed is he, for he could have transgressed, and hath not transgressed; he could do evil things, and hath not done them.*" And what a vast number of sacrifices is made by that one, who often drawn and urged by passion, constantly resists its seductions, and refuses the object which it presents to his concupiscence. Few moments pass unmarked by victory. The repeated and varied assaults of the enemy only serve to swell the number of victims, which the faithful warrior immolates to God. What a treasure of merits in these hand-to-hand struggles with passion! We do not ourselves perceive every sacrifice which we make, but the all-seeing eye of God does not suffer one to escape. Is anything more needed to console us in this state, and to encourage us to perseverance? If the contest is severe, the crown is brilliant; one minute of pain, and an eternity of glory! And who would wish to exchange eternal glory, for a minute's gratification?

Nor is the merit restricted to these repeated sacrifices, new treasures are found in the interior virtues practised at such a time. We very well feel that we can not maintain successful resistance without the aid of Heaven, without the light, and the motives of faith, the inspirations of hope, and

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the support of divine charity. Our heart is occupied in a continual exercise of prayer, and in forming repeated acts of these exalted virtues. If one sole act of divine charity, is so powerful as to reconcile a sinner with God, how much merit does he not acquire who in his combats is constantly repeating this act!

What ignorance, then, to suppose that time so employed in resisting temptation, is lost for heaven and perfection, when it is evident from what has been said, that on the contrary we are laboring most actively to practise the one, and gain the other.

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